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TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

By
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PREFACE

THIS book is for those who have an urge to write but who also have the sense to see that writing for the periodical Press is a skilled craft which does not come by the light of nature.

No claim is made that before the reader reaches the last page he will be earning several hundred a year by his pen. Success in freelance writing depends on native ability, intelligence and perseverance. But it is possible to smooth the road for the beginner—to suggest ways of surmounting difficulties and to point out some of the pitfalls. For the sad fact about so many “rejection slips” is that they result from errors which could easily have been avoided.

Readers who are concerned more particularly with newspaper work may care to follow up their studies with the companion volume in the same series, *Teach Yourself Journalism*.

E. F. C.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
1. OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FREELANCE	9
2. BEFORE YOU BEGIN	17
3. THE FREELANCE AT WORK (1)	28
4. THE FREELANCE AT WORK (2)	38
5. IN SEARCH OF IDEAS	47
6. THE TECHNIQUE OF ARTICLE WRITING (1)	57
7. THE TECHNIQUE OF ARTICLE WRITING (2)	65
8. FREELANCE NEWS-GATHERING	78
9. FEATURE WORK	86
10. THE SHORT STORY (1)	95
11. THE SHORT STORY (2)	108
12. WRITING FOR RADIO	127
13. WRITING FOR CHILDREN	139
14. THE PICTURE MAKES THE STORY	151
15. PREPARING AND SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS	162
16. THE LAW OF COPYRIGHT AND LIBEL	172
17. FREELANCE MARKETS	181
TEST EXERCISES	192
SOME BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING	197
INDEX	199

CHAPTER ONE

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FREELANCE

WHY do you want to become a writer? Is it because your mind is always crowded with ideas clamouring for expression? Is it because words fascinate you; colourful phrases, scraps of vivid conversation, buzz in your head and shout aloud to be written down on paper? Or perhaps it is that you have something to say, a message to pass on, a gospel to preach, a crusade to proclaim. Or you are attracted by that aura of romance which surrounds the writer; to see yourself in print, to know that thousands all over the country are reading what has been written by you, to find your name on dust-jacket or magazine cover in shop-windows and on station book-stalls. Or perhaps you are dissatisfied with your present employment, frustrated by a monotonous daily routine from which creative writing seems to offer a way of escape. Or perhaps it is just that you are hard up and in search of some congenial way of supplementing your income.

Whatever your motives may be—and they are probably mixed—it is the purpose of this book to explain the opportunities open to the freelance writer today, and what you must do if you wish to grasp them, and also to help you in deciding what chances you have of success.

Journalism and Authorship.

We begin by drawing a distinction between the two

10 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

main branches of writing—journalism and authorship.

The journalist is one who writes for the periodical press: newspapers, magazines, trade journals and the like. His task is to report what is happening, to reflect the passing scene, to comment upon the occurrences of the moment and to influence public opinion thereon. This is not to say that he is never constructive, a mere "writing machine", bringing nothing of his own to his task. Much magazine and newspaper journalism calls for high qualities of originality, skill and judgment. But, speaking generally, journalism is not creative—its function is to work over existing material in the form of happenings, facts and ideas, and to make these readily available to the reading public.

The author, on the other hand, is a creative artist. It is true that he, too, takes his material—lives and characters, personalities and events, ideas and beliefs—from the real world around him, but he selects, alters and fuses these together in his mind and heart so that the resulting product cannot be analysed into its component parts, for he has made of it something new. There is no hard-and-fast dividing line between the two forms of writing, but the difference is nevertheless a real one.

Opportunities in Freelance Journalism.

A freelance journalist is one who, while writing with some regularity for the periodical press, is not on the staff of any newspaper or journal. He is free to write what and when he pleases and is limited only by his own inventive genius, his capacity for hard work and the willingness of editors to absorb his

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FREELANCE , fr
output. He is paid, at varying rates, for such of his work as is actually published or accepted for publication.

There are three fields open to the freelance journalist :—

- (a) The supply of news stories, i.e. items of current news, to newspapers and the technical and trade Press on a so-much-a-word basis, called "linage".
- (b) The writing of "specials", i.e. single articles or groups of articles on particular topics in which the writer is a specialist, or has become particularly interested, or which he has "got up" for the occasion. This is the field most likely to appeal to the beginner and is the one in which he or she stands most chance of an initial success.
- (c) "Feature" work. Opportunities here range from the contribution of an occasional gossip paragraph up to the actual conducting of a feature such as a post-bag or a Readers' Queries column.

Opportunities in Authorship.

The field here is less easy to define since the author, by the very nature of his creative function, enjoys a freedom that the journalist can never know. There are, however, some clearly marked paths along which success is most likely to lie—always bearing in mind that (a) genius makes its own rules, and (b) there is no accounting for the vagaries of popular taste.

Of these paths the short story offers most attraction to beginners. The demand is large and constant; the stories in any particular magazine run true to

form, so that a style can be studied and imitated with some prospect of success ; there are numerous prizes and competitions for short stories by which the novice can measure his talent ; and the rejection of a short story which has taken perhaps a week to write is less devastating than the failure of a novel, the fruit of many months of labour. But the modern short story has developed a highly finished technique, which is not learned in a day. And the competition in this field is intense.

Many prefer the full-length novel as a starting-point. There is room to turn round ; characters and situations can be unfolded in a more leisurely fashion ; there is less demand for the sharply pointed and highly concentrated writing required in the short story ; the intimate knowledge of a particular background or way of life can be exploited to fuller advantage. And there is undoubtedly plenty of encouragement here for new writers.

Besides the short story and the novel, there are other forms which the aspiring author would do well to keep in mind. The theatre, the radio and the films are all on the look-out for new talent, while those who have experiences to relate or specialised knowledge to impart should remember that there is a steady demand for lively and informative travel books, biographies—and autobiographies—popular studies of natural history and other sciences, and the like. Collections of short stories, essays or poems, however, have little prospect of finding a publisher unless the author is already very well known.

One of the most promising fields for 'beginners lies in writing for children. There is a large demand from the publishers of children's papers, magazines and

annuals for stories, poems and articles. The rewards are not usually substantial, but the technique, for those who have any understanding of children, is comparatively easy to learn nor does the work make great demands on the writer.

Many of the forms of authorship and journalism outlined above are dealt with in later chapters. It cannot be too strongly emphasised at the outset, however, that whichever path the beginner feels is best suited to his talents or offers most prospect of success, the craft of writing must first be learned and then the particular technique of his chosen field. There is no royal road to success. The chances that the inexperienced tyro will wake up one morning to find that his first literary effort has made him famous are remote indeed.

Full-Time or Part-Time ?

Sooner or later, every freelance writer is faced with the problem : "Am I to give up my bread-and-butter employment and make writing a full-time occupation or am I to continue writing in my spare time ?" This is not an easy decision to make ; so many factors are involved. One's degree of talent as a writer, for example. And the nature and prospects of one's present employment. Personal qualities of self-discipline, and staying-power must also be considered, as must existing or potential family commitments. Physical health, too, is important, since all but the most successful writers must depend for their livelihood on the regular output of first-rate, saleable material.*

And yet, the annals of both journalism and literature are filled with the stories of those who might

14. TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

never have achieved success had they not given themselves over wholly to their chosen career, often at the price of years of failure and hardship. In the last resort, the decision must rest with the individual, made in the light of his own most searching self-examination and the advice, if he can get it, of competent critics such as editors and publishers. It was Charles Lamb who said that "literature is a bad crutch but a very good walking-stick". If you have a reasonably well paid occupation, you may regard that as your financial crutch until you can walk unaided in the paths of writing, but you will do well to pause before throwing away your crutch prematurely. Later in this book we give some indication of the earnings the moderately successful writer may expect from his pen. Do a little arithmetic before deciding to make freelance writing a whole-time career. Seeking employment as a full-time professional journalist on the staff of a newspaper or magazine is, of course, a different matter. Here the rewards are more regular and predictable and the security greater, even though the freedom may be less than in the freelance field.

Opportunities for Women in Freelance Writing.

Authorship and journalism are among the few spheres in which women have not only claimed equality with men but have had that equality recognised by equal opportunities and equal pay. Indeed, there are those who maintain that in fiction-writing, in biography and in many forms of article-writing, the woman's intuition, her flair for assessing personality, her skill in detecting and revealing the "human angle", and the widespread feminine gift for writing

smooth, readable prose, give her a positive advantage over her male competitors.

Of two facts there can be no doubt. Enrolments in correspondence and other courses for freelance writers reveal a high proportion of women aspirants for literary honours, while a glance through current magazines and publishers' lists will show how correspondingly high is the number of women among those who succeed. The truth seems to be that, except in a few limited fields such as some branches of sports reporting and the more "hard-boiled" type of thriller, women enjoy the same opportunities as men; an editor or publisher is seldom influenced by the sex of the writer, judging the work purely on its merits. And there are some fields, such as social journalism, fashion, beauty culture, the domestic arts, child care, and so on, where women have the market very much in their own hands.

No woman, then, need hesitate to set herself the task of becoming a professional writer, or an occasional freelance, merely because she is a woman. On the other hand, the fact that she is a woman will gain her no favours or concessions. If she is to succeed, it will be on merit alone. She must learn her trade and win her spurs, play fair and keep faith. The laws of copyright and libel are the same for her as for men, and editors have high standards and long memories which are unlikely to be affected by a pretty face, a pitiful tale or an air of guileless innocence.

Influence.

Many young writers—unknown, living in the provinces perhaps, far from the centre of things, knowing

16. TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

no one of importance in the literary or journalistic world—feel that they have little chance of success. This is not so. Most of our great writers—J. B. Priestley, H. G. Wells, J. M. Barrie, Howard Spring, to name but a few—have begun thus. If what you write is likely to appeal to a high proportion of their readers, editors and publishers will buy it; that is their job. Every one of them is on the look-out for new writers, for the “wastage” at the top must be made up from below. It is true that articles, stories or novels by great writers are more certain of a ready acceptance than the work of the unknown beginner. This is because editors know that the established writer has the confidence of the public, who will therefore buy what he writes. But that confidence has had to be won first, and to be won by honest toil and often after many failures and disappointments. Influence is not the gateway to success in writing, nor is its absence a barrier.

CHAPTER TWO

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

SUCCESSFUL writers are made, not born. True, some people possess innate aptitudes which give them a long start and make the learning process easier and more pleasurable, but the learning has still to be done. In this, journalism and authorship resemble painting or architecture or music. The strange thing is that, whereas no art or architecture or music student would dream of offering his immature apprentice efforts for public sale, many would-be writers press their first effusions on busy editors, seriously expecting them to be accepted, published and paid for. It is odd, to say the least of it.

The art of writing consists of two things: having something to say and knowing how to say it. The course of training which any beginner sets himself must cover both these aspects. We begin here with the second.

Mastery of Correct English.

This is essential. It would, perhaps, be untrue to say that no writer or journalist ever achieved success in this country whose command of correct English was unsound, but it is certain that the scales are heavily weighted against those with such a handicap. Editors, publishers' readers, reviewers, and the general public are all quick to detect errors in grammar, faults of style, inaccuracies in word usage and slipshod writing generally. And whenever such

18 TEACH YOURSELF 'FREELANCE WRITING

blemishes are found, the perpetrators must fall in the estimation of their readers.

Anyone who wishes to take up writing as a profession or as a part-time occupation would be wise to begin by assuring himself that he is secure in his mastery of correct English. At the end of the chapter we offer a short test-paper which the reader is invited to attempt. If the questions give trouble, then something must be done about it. Private study with the aid of a good text-book (see p. 197) can do much, but there is no real substitute for expert tuition accompanied by the detailed correction of the student's own written work. A local Technical College or Evening Institute can usually provide a suitable course in English Language; failing this, it will pay anyone conscious of this crippling weakness to take a few lessons with a competent private tutor.

Learning the Writer's Craft.

But the writing of correct English, however essential, is a foundation only. In addition, the student must acquire such a command of the written word that he can meet every call that the expression of his thoughts, his feelings, his ideas may make upon him. He must be able to adapt his style to different situations, to shifting moods, to changing emotions. For each piece of writing, each type of subject-matter, each "market" will make its own demands upon him. Once success has come, he can afford to write as he pleases, for what he has written will be acceptable for the sake of his name. But until that time comes, adaptability, the power of being stylistically "all things to all men" must be his aim.

Words are the tools of the writer's craft, and the greater his knowledge and command of words the better craftsman he will be. He must make a conscious effort to widen his vocabulary, noting down every new word that comes his way (with its *exact* meaning, origin, usage, and spelling). A reliable dictionary, such as the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, should be his constant companion. He should browse through this in search of words hitherto unknown to him or only partially understood; this will be time well spent. And whenever a new word is added to his stock, he should use it in speech or writing at the earliest occasion so that it may become his own by adoption.

Let the beginner, too, follow the practice of so many successful apprentices to the craft and learn by imitation. Let him take the work of this or that writer who has achieved eminence in the field he himself wishes to cultivate and let him study the style, see how it is done, learn the tricks of the trade, and then lay the model aside and try a piece of writing himself in that style on a similar theme. There are some suggestions for such exercises at the end of the chapter.

Educational Background.

No one who wishes to write for the public Press, whether it be as journalist, short story writer or novelist, can afford to be less well educated than the generality of his readers. And the standard of education in this country, in spite of what is sometimes said to the contrary, is steadily rising. The moral is obvious. Any deficiencies in the would-be writer's general education must be made good: for

if not, they will surely reveal themselves, not only in errors of fact but also in subtler ways, in an immaturity of attitude, in the treatment of commonly accepted knowledge and ideas as though they were matters needing explanation or comment. Nor is this a fault which can be specifically cured or avoided. The danger can only be removed by ensuring that the writer possesses an equipment of knowledge and culture as wide as, and preferably wider than that of the average run of readers. His attitude towards facts and ideas will then be similar to theirs.

Each beginner must seek out and remedy his own deficiencies, remembering that some fields of study are more important to the writer than others. The fact that he was not a shining success at higher mathematics or that he has never studied a foreign language need not be a serious handicap. On the other hand, no writer can afford to be without a grasp of the main currents of English and European history, of world geography, of the history of English literature and, in these days perhaps, of general science. A course of wide but carefully planned reading is the best way in which the adult student can fill in such gaps in his educational equipment.

Becoming Well Informed.

The recent Report of the Royal Commission on the Press said of the journalist :

The more complex the matters which he communicates to the public become, the more essential it is that the journalist should be a man of keen intelligence and sound education. Unless the journalist has some knowledge and understanding of the subject on which he is working, he can hardly report it accurately. He cannot obtain the information he



needs or assess the reliability of the information he is given. If he lacks the background which makes an event, a speech, or a discovery significant, he cannot make it significant, or even intelligible, to his readers; and being unable to make his subject itself interesting, he will tend to fall back on the trivialities incidental to it.

It is important that the journalist should have a good general education, but this is not enough. He needs a fuller knowledge of history and English than his schooling will have given him, a knowledge of the processes of central and local government and of the courts, and at least a grounding in economics. His level of education needs to be higher than that of the mass of his readers, and as the general level rises, so should his.

Nor, however good his general education may be, can the writer for the public Press afford to allow his knowledge to become rusty or out of date. Unless he is prepared to keep constantly abreast of current affairs and ideas he will run the risk at every turn of revealing his ignorance and so of forfeiting the respect of his readers. The would-be writer must be both well educated and well informed.

Here again the solution lies largely in a course of reading, but reading of a different kind. The best and most up-to-date commentary on the ever-moving stream of world affairs is to be found, not in books, which must always be tardy followers of events, but in the columns of current newspapers and magazines. The man or woman who each day reads conscientiously through one of the so-called "quality" newspapers, such as *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph* or *Manchester Guardian*, will not miss much that is worth knowing about happenings at home and abroad, about new discoveries and ideas, about new books, plays and films, about current trends in

22 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

music, art, and the field of culture generally. If this is supplemented at the week-end by the reading of a newspaper or magazine of a different political outlook, and by some attention to radio talks and discussions, no one need have any fear that his writing will betray those "pockets" of ignorance so damaging to a journalist's or author's reputation.

Knowing How the Wheels Go Round.

Every writer should know something of the technical processes involved in printing and publishing. He should know how books, magazines and newspapers are produced, what publishers, editors and printers can reasonably be expected to do for him and what they will require of him in return.

There are many useful books on these topics, some of which are listed on page 197, but these should be supplemented by first-hand knowledge. The keen beginner, wherever he lives, will usually find it possible to strike up an acquaintance with someone on the staff of a local newspaper. Visits to the office of the paper, and later to other large offices, can be arranged and the complicated, highly organised business of producing a modern newspaper studied from beginning to end. Particular attention should be paid to what happens to "copy" in a newspaper office before it is passed to the printers to be set up in type, for it is during these early stages, known as "subbing", that the writer's material is licked into shape.

Provided he does not make a nuisance of himself, the serious student will find sympathy and helpfulness among all ranks of professional journalists, for there is no calling in which there is a stronger tradition of

comradeship and a greater readiness to assist the beginner with information and advice.

The Writer's Responsibility.

Finally, a few words on the obligations and responsibilities of the professional writer. "The pen is mightier than the sword," and the power of the printed word has never been greater than it is today. He who writes for the public Press has a duty to his readers, to his fellow-writers and to the community at large. This duty is fourfold:—

- (a) **Accuracy.** Whatever is written must be true in substance and in fact. To mislead the reader, either deliberately or carelessly, is to betray his trust—and, incidentally, to forfeit one's credit with at least one editor or publisher.
- (b) **Originality.** What is written must be the writer's own work. Ascertained and published facts are the property of all, but to rehash the *ideas* of others or to steal their words, i.e. to be guilty of plagiarism, is morally wrong, quite apart from any breach of the law of copyright.
- (c) **Topicality.** The material the writer uses as the basis of his articles, stories, etc., must be the latest available. To be out-of-date is to mislead those readers who know no better and to invite the scorn of those who do.
- (d) **Integrity.** If he is to succeed and build up a worth-while reputation, the writer must be sincere, honest, well-disposed, without malice or rancour, balanced in judgment, jealous for the honour of his calling. The charlatan,

24 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

the trickster, the literary prostitute, the vain poseur may perhaps impose on editors and the reading public for a time; but sooner or later their shallowness and emptiness are revealed and they disappear. Without qualities of personal integrity no writer can hope to achieve any wide or lasting acceptance for his work.

EXERCISES ON CHAPTER TWO

A. EXERCISES TO TEST COMMAND OF CORRECT ENGLISH

1. Correct the following sentences where necessary, and give reasons for your corrections:—

- (a) The reviewers agree that this is one of the most interesting novels that has recently been issued.
- (b) This is the man whom we thought was to blame
- (c) He said that Jones had committed a blunder and will have to take the consequences.
- (d) A necklace of diamonds, presented by friends of the bride, were among the presents on view.
- (e) Let me say, just between you and I, how shocked I am about the whole business.
- (f) The Government has chosen its moment to force a General Election on the country, but are they so certain in their hearts that they will be returned to power?
It was soon evident that everybody had lost their heads.
- (h) It is to him and such men (as he) that we owe the change.
- (i) The time has come to once again re-issue the order to each member of the department.
- (j) To build up the education of the country, it will be necessary for the poorly trained teachers to be substituted by the thoroughly trained ones.

- (k) My friend is more skilful than me in dealing with these kind of problems.
- (l) We were not only impressed by his manner but also by his appearance.
- (m) It is fine now but I shouldn't wonder if it doesn't rain before long.
- (n) She is the most interesting of all her sisters.
- (o) The statistics just published show that less men were injured on the railways last year than in any previous year.
- (p) You can rely on me doing all in my power to avert such a disaster.
- (q) Of the two schemes put forward by the Government I think this is the one most likely to succeed.
- (r) He had done (all and) more than was expected.
- (s) This is a matter of the greatest importance and which everyone should think over carefully.
- (t) Being a plain and straightforward man, this proposal strikes me as dishonest.
- (u) We have the largest circulation of any weekly newspaper.
- (v) The outcome was quite different to what we had expected.
- (w) At the conference four delegates were bent on throwing the blame on each other for what had happened.
- (x) It was quite unnecessary for him to have communicated with the police.
2. Re-write the following sentences, making any improvements you think necessary :
- (a) Each of the three last men were expected to have stopped and voted.
- (b) The cause of the rise in prices is (due to) the scarcity of labour.
- (c) There were a few companies (comprised chiefly of) militiamen.
- (d) The reason I find the subject distasteful (is) on

26 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

Account of the numerous figures one has to learn.

- (e) The charge of stealing (at the request of the lad's employer) was dropped.
- (f) To all appearances he seems incapable of carrying out the work.
- (g) After conversing with him for some time, I discovered that we had a mutual acquaintance at Hampstead.
- (h) The one is (equally) as bad as the other.
- (i) The silence that underlaid the even voice of the breakers along the sea front was profound.
- (j) Immediately I received the news I hastened to the spot to be ready for anything that might transpire.
- (k) The reverend gentleman sustained a broken thigh as a result of this catastrophe.
- (l) The war brought all work upon it to a close, and like many other literary undertakings, it has only now been possible to give it the finishing touches.
- (m) (The subject of) the first paragraph tells how the couriers brought news of a great victory.

B. EXERCISES IN THE CRAFT OF WRITING

1. Take a leading article from a "popular" newspaper and re-write it in the style of a leader in *The Times*.
2. Compose letters on the same topic as they might be written by different members of your family.
3. Take a scene from a play by Shakespeare or Sheridan and re-write it in modern dialogue.
4. Describe a scene as it might be depicted by two writers with distinctive styles, e.g. Dickens and J. B. Priestley.
5. Write up the same news-story as it might appear in the local weekly and in a national daily.
6. Describe a familiar place seen from an unusual angle or under unusual conditions.

7. Write, on the same subject, articles suitable for the following markets :
 - (a) a local newspaper;
 - (b) a popular magazine;
 - (c) a trade paper or technical journal.
 - (d) a radio talk.
8. Write character studies of your friends or relatives, showing them first in a favourable then in an unfavourable light.
9. Take an article from an old magazine and work up the same material into a new article with a topical appeal.
10. Select a difficult passage from a text-book or technical journal and re-write it in a style intelligible to the general reader.
11. Relate an anecdote or describe a situation, bringing out first its serious and then its humorous aspect.
12. Compile lists of words under the following and similar headings :—
 - (a) Colours : shades of blue, red, green, yellow, etc.
 - (b) Verbs of saying, e.g. he asked, whispered, etc.
 - (c) Verbs describing ways of walking into or across a room.
 - (d) Adjectives describing people
 - (i) favourable, (ii) unfavourable.
 - (e) Emotions reflected on a person's face.
 - (f) Adjectives of size, frequency, appearance.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FREELANCE AT WORK (I)

THE path to success for the freelance writer is not an easy one. He must expect to meet many difficulties and disappointments by the way. Hours, days, or even weeks of work will often lead to nothing but the all-too-familiar rejection-slip. Dogged perseverance, the ability to maintain faith in himself in spite of setback after setback, a cool sense of proportion which refuses to regard one small success as a sign that he has arrived at last, and above all the ability to learn by experience; all these the freelance, unless he is the rare exception, will surely need in the early days.

And even given these qualities, success is by no means assured. A knowledge and understanding of the human heart, a balanced sense of values which enables him to gauge accurately what the average man or woman in the street will find interesting and will want to read, the gift of fluent self-expression; these, too, he will require if success is to crown his efforts.

Nor must he expect to make large sums of money in the early stages of his apprenticeship. The struggling beginner, with nothing more than a couple of gossip paragraphs in a provincial newspaper to his credit, is often discouraged by the airy boasts of those who "do a bit of writing" and claim to have made eight guineas here and six guineas there for articles they "knocked off in an evening". Closer

enquiry will usually reveal that the accepted contributions were rare successes among many failures, that they were written on subjects the writer had studied for years and that each took a good deal longer than one evening to write. Writing is a highly skilled profession requiring as much training as any other profession; those who are bursting to "see themselves in print" or to make easy money but are not prepared to serve their apprenticeship by hard work and perseverance, have very little chance of success.

Making a Start.

Once having decided to face the "blood and sweat and tears" to achieve his goal, the beginner must next select his point of attack. The field of opportunity is wide and varied; the choice of where to begin will depend on the inclinations and abilities of each individual. In seeking this the beginner will do well at first to range widely, trying his or her hand at everything which seems to offer any possibility of success. News-stories, articles (informative, descriptive, controversial, humorous), short stories, gossip-paragraphs, feature articles, material for children; he should attempt them all. The training in collecting and handling varied material and adapting style to differing purposes will be invaluable in itself, as well as confirming or revealing special aptitudes.

After this preliminary period, which may be likened to the Army's "general training", the beginner should be ready to set about mastering a particular field, working away at one type of writing, comparing his work with that of acknowledged experts, studying, imitating, improvising, until he

30 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

feels secure in his own competence. Then, and not till then, he can think about actually marketing his wares. If, of course, during these early stages, he thinks that he has turned out some exceptionally good piece of work, he can submit it to a likely market. But let him do so with every expectation that it will be returned, and if by chance it is not, let him regard the resultant cheque as "pennies from heaven" rather than as solid, repeatable earnings—and get on with his training!

Need for Working Systematically.

The great attraction that freelance writing has for many liberty-loving souls is the freedom it gives to choose one's own time and methods of working. But this very freedom has its dangers. The writer is particularly apt, if he allows himself, to become a creature of moods, to wait upon inspiration. The writer who works only when he feels like it will produce but little. He will find that there are always a thousand reasons why he should not write at any particular time—social engagements, family ties, the need for exercise, the need to do his accounts, an expedition which might produce useful material, and so on.

The only safe rule is to work systematically. Whether the freelance is a part-timer working in the evenings or on his days off, or whether he is making writing a full-time career, he should draw up a timetable and keep to it, no matter what the temptations may be in other directions. At the time appointed he should sit down at his desk, whether he feels like it or not, and set to work on whatever comes to hand. In this way the mind can be trained to respond and

to function satisfactorily whenever it is called upon to do so. For the first quarter of an hour the output may, perhaps, be small or inferior. But soon the brain will fall into gear, interest will be aroused, ideas will flow and what might have been a wasted afternoon or evening will have yielded its appointed quota of saleable copy.

There is much more in journalism and authorship than the actual process of writing, but whether it be the collecting or arranging of material, the keeping of note-books and cuttings-files, the making and maintaining of personal contacts, the checking, dispatch and recording of finished work, there is the same need for systematic methods. The dilettante playing at being a writer, or the specialist wishing to express his views or increase his prestige within his own field can afford to take a more leisurely path, but the freelance who intends to make writing a profession must approach his work in as methodical a way as would an architect or an accountant. Every hour of the working day is precious, and must be used to the best advantage. Where there are two possible lines of action, he must follow, not the one he fancies, but the one which offers most prospects of advantage.

Market Study.

A great many of the MSS. submitted to editors by beginners are rejected because they have no saleable value—they are apprentice-work which should have been thrown away after having served its purpose of giving the learner practice. If the writers are disappointed, they have only their own folly to blame for submitting such work. But what many quite capable students find so frustrating is the continued

rejection of their work when they are convinced, often justifiably, that they have something worth while to say and have gained some mastery in the art of saying it. Where M.S.'s. are good but are still being rejected, the explanation is usually that they are being sent to the wrong market.

All large manufacturing firms spend considerable sums every year in market research—the careful study of what the consumers of their products are demanding at the moment, so that they may keep up to date, and a continual search for new markets where they can offer their products for sale. Indeed, market research has become a science and some firms consider it worth their while to pay highly trained experts to do nothing else. The freelance writer, too, must be something of a salesman, offering his wares to editors and through them to the reading public. And unless he is prepared to do a little market research on his own account, he cannot hope to build up a secure and regular connection.

The first principle in studying freelance markets is that each periodical has a *policy*, a policy which, except for slight shifting of emphasis from time to time, is remarkably constant. What most readers ask of their favourite magazine is variety within a familiar pattern, and that, therefore, is what the editor gives them. The freelance must learn what that pattern is before he or she can hope to submit contributions to a particular periodical with any prospect of success.

The pattern that any journal will follow is determined by the class of reader for whom it is intended. The classification may be by the age, sex, occupation, tastes or views of the group of readers the periodical

seeks to reach. Anything which is unlikely to interest his particular group will be automatically rejected by any editor, however good it may be in itself. For he knows only too well that as soon as a reader ceases to find what he wants in one magazine he will turn elsewhere. Since editors are busy people, they seldom have time to differentiate on a rejection-slip between the good but unsuitable and the merely valueless. The beginner must, therefore, find out for himself.

How to Study a Market.

Market-study is at two levels, general and detailed. The student must first make it his business to know all the periodicals that publish the kind of material he hopes to write. This will entail much time and effort, but the resulting knowledge and assurance in placing his work will make this well worth while. Whenever a likely market is encountered for the first time, a note should be made of the title and publisher of the periodical. A copy can then be obtained and filed for detailed study and further reference. A useful way of keeping up to date in one's knowledge of new periodicals and those that have ceased publication is to consult the weekly *Trade Circular* issued by W. H. Smith & Sons. Although this is issued to the trade only, the freelance writer can usually gain access to a copy.

But merely knowing of the existence of likely markets in a general way is not sufficient. The policy, the characteristics and the demands of each must be studied in detail, and this knowledge must be kept constantly up to date. It is here that the real work of market research begins. The freelance must be prepared to spend a great deal of time reading what

the magazines for which he hopes to write are actually publishing—not cursory reading for pleasure, but purposeful, concentrated study. For periodicals are his text-books; from them he learns not only how to plan and shape his own work, but where to place that work when it is completed.

What procedure should the student follow in studying a particular market? Let us suppose that he has come across a periodical new to him, which seems to offer possibilities as a market for the kind of articles or stories he thinks he can write. In his "Markets" note-book he will head a page with the name of the periodical and its publishers, adding below the address of publication, the date and frequency of its appearance and the price. He will then scan through its contents, estimating and noting down the type of reader-interest which he considers the magazine is intended to meet. Each relevant item of the contents must then be read through carefully, a note being made of title, author, style, whether illustrated, and, most important, *length*. For wrong length is almost as frequent a cause of rejection as unsuitability. Comparison of several issues of any periodical, or a glance at editors' requirements given in Market Guides such as the *Writers' and Artists' Year Book* will show that consistency of length is as common as consistency of tone and reader-interest. An article or story written for a particular market must be so planned as to fit into the prescribed number of words. If a contribution is outstandingly good for his purpose, but too long, an editor *may* accept it and have it "cut" in the office, but the writer will stand more chance of success, and probably be better satisfied with the results, if he does the

cutting himself. Careful attention should also be given to, and notes made of, any "features" carried, e.g. gossip column, short news items, post-bag, competitions, joke-page; such features usually depend largely on outside contributions, which, although not paid for at high rates, can earn useful sums in the aggregate.

Here is a specimen page from the "Markets" notebook of a freelance interested in writing factual or informative articles of a general nature.

"Britannia and Eve"

Publishers: British National Newspapers, Ltd.,
1, New Oxford Street, W.C.1. Monthly. 2s.

Reader Appeal: General reading. Strong Home
and Fashion Section. Good class. Intelligent.

FEBRUARY,

1. *Television Will Change Your Life*. By Curtiss Hamilton.

Length: 800 words.

Illustrations: Title sketch.

Theme: The effect that the introduction of a television set into the home will have on the lives of each member of an ordinary family.

Topicality: Establishment of TV transmitter at Sutton Coldfield.

2. *The Call of the North*. Where the Spirit of Adventure is as Rich as Ever it Was. By Frank Illingworth.

Length: 1,750.

Illustrations: Seven photographs with captions, showing various aspects of life in the Far North.

Theme: The attractions which the Arctic regions have to offer: adventure, opportunity, change, beauty. Some impressions of these regions and their peoples.

Topicality: The newly realised mineral and industrial possibilities of the Arctic.

36 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

3. *100 Years of Public Libraries.* By Guy Livingstone.

Length : 1,200 words.

Illustrations : Three photographs of modern Public Libraries in Manchester and London. Two exterior, one interior.

Theme : The beginnings and the growth of Public Library provision from 1850 to 1950.

Topicality : Centenary of the passing of the first Public Libraries Act.

4. *Madagascar : Sinbad's Island and Pearl of the Indian Ocean.* By Martin Thornhill.

Length : 1,500 words.

Illustrations : Four photographs of scenes and life in Madagascar.

Theme : A general, factual account of the island, including points of interest from its scenery, its people, its past history and present condition.

Topicality : The movement to claim independence of the French Empire among some of the inhabitants.

5. *Shropshire Lad—with a Difference. The story of "Mad" Mytton.* By Warren Armstrong.

Length : 2,800 words.

Illustrations : Five sepia illustrations by Jack Matthews of scenes from Mytton's career.

Theme : The life story of an eccentric figure of the early 19th century who dissipated his life and fortune and died in a debtor's prison at the age of 38.

6. *Peak Time for Impostors.* By Ferdinand Tuohy (American).

Length : 2,000 words.

Illustrations : Coloured title sketch.

Theme : Types of impostors and their ways. Pretenders, impersonators, swindlers and humbugs. The underlying "why".

Topicality : Present-day conditions tend to encourage impostors.

7. *Talking of Elections.* By Harry J. Greenwall.

Length : 1,500 words.

Illustrations : Coloured title sketch.

Theme : Election habits and customs in various countries, written from writer's own experience as a political journalist.

Topicality : British General Election.

8. *Britain's Loneliest Islands. Outposts off the Scottish Coast.* By Richard Perry.

Length : 1,300 words.

Illustrations : Four photographs of St. Kilda, the Flannan Isles, etc., reproduced from *Island Going* by Robert Atkinson (Collins).

Theme : Descriptions of the rocky islets in the Atlantic, now uninhabited except for the keepers of the Flannan lighthouse.

A writer of short stories, or one with specialised interests in housecraft or sport would, of course, have made a different selection. The professional freelance will need to maintain note-books of this kind throughout his career if he or she is to keep in touch with the latest trends in periodical journalism and so continue to produce saleable material.

The detailed study of good models which we spoke of as forming part of the essential training of the beginner is a different matter. We return to this, with examples, in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE 'FREELANCE AT WORK (2)

First Steps.

WE may now follow the career of the freelance a little further. Let us suppose that he has taken the advice given in earlier chapters: ensuring that his command of correct English is secure, that his educational background is adequate and that he is sufficiently well informed about current affairs and the world around him to avoid the pitfalls which beset the ignorant and immature. We will suppose, too, that he has discovered the particular field in which his talents are most likely to achieve success, and that he has gained a sound working knowledge of most at least of the periodicals publishing material in that field. He is now ready to produce, not the occasional article that finds a market largely by good fortune, but a steady stream of saleable work.

His next step will be to build up a connection, a group of periodicals which are prepared to take his work with reasonable frequency and regularity. This is an uphill task for all but the fortunate few. Text-books and teachers can do little for him here. Nor, in spite of widespread belief to the contrary, is influence or wire-pulling of much value. It may help to bring work to an editor's notice, but it will not secure acceptance; and the work would be accepted or rejected in just the same way had it arrived through the usual channels. For if material is worth publishing, editors will be glad to use it; this is their

business. Conversely, if work is not up to standard, they dare not, for their very reputation's sake, accept it. There are, however, one or two hints which may prove useful.

The first we have already indicated. The beginner should make sure no work is rejected through his own folly, either because it has been sent to the wrong market or because it is the wrong length or in an unsuitable style.

The second point is this. It is unwise to be too ambitious at the start. A beginning should be made with the smaller markets. Work submitted to one of the great London dailies or to the magazines with large, nation-wide circulations must compete with the output of established experts whose work is often supremely good of its kind and known to be so by the editors. True, the payments made by such periodicals are usually much higher, but it is better to have work accepted, published and paid for by an obscure local paper or small trade journal than to receive a rejection-slip bearing the name of the most illustrious of London publishing houses.

The beginner will find it a good plan to single out one or two of the more modest periodicals publishing the kind of material he thinks he can write and set about conquering these first. He should study their contents, style and policy, on the lines suggested in the previous chapter, and then plug away at them, submitting article after article, story after story. And if the choice has been made judiciously, the market study has been intelligent, and the writer has the native ability, success will come. Two or three markets, rather than one, should be chosen since what is rejected by one editor may sometimes be

accepted by another. Editorial tastes and judgment vary, and there is always the possibility that a periodical may have already published something of the kind submitted in a recent issue.

When at last the great day comes, and the postman's knock is followed not by the heavy thud of a returned MS. but by the flick of an acceptance note on the mat, the freelance must press his advantage home. It may be a mere flash in the pan or the turning of the tide at last—time alone will show. But for the moment he must assume that it is the latter, and send a stream of similar material in the same direction, while still persisting with his efforts elsewhere.

In the early stages, both failures and successes should be analysed carefully when their fate is known, so that the beginner may gain the maximum benefit from his experience. Every rejected MS. should be examined afresh, examined with a coldly critical eye to discover why it failed, and then compared with similar contributions actually published in recent issues, shortcomings being sought out and noted down. Successful contributions should be examined even more carefully. The writer must try to find out what led the editor to accept this one while rejecting others apparently as good. Was it originality of subject-matter, or freshness of approach, or greater maturity and crispness of style? Was it fortunate topicality, or the illustrations that were sent with it, or was it because it was written convincingly on a subject with which the writer was deeply concerned? And having thus ferreted out the secret of his success, the beginner must exploit this advantage to the full. He has his foot on the first rung of the ladder.

Building Up a Connection.

Market research is practised by the buyer as well as by the seller in the literary world. Editors, even more than contributors, must study the contents of their own and other editors' journals. Once a writer's work has been published, his name, his abilities and his particular "line" are known to at least one editor. Any further contributions he may send will be examined with a credit balance in his favour. If he follows a first success with inferior work he will soon lose this credit balance, but if standard is maintained his MSS. will secure increasingly ready acceptance. And the world of journalism, especially magazine journalism, is a comparatively small one. One editor talks to another; the work of new writers gradually becomes known. This is the kind of "influence" that is of value to the beginner, the influence that one editor, whose judgment is widely respected, has over others.

Many beginners ask at what stage they should make personal contact with editors. It usually does more harm than good to seek an interview with an editor before he has accepted any of your work. To go to an editor with an idea, a synopsis or a rough draft—or just to ask him what he thinks you ought to write—is to waste his time and your own. Nothing but the finished product is of any use at the early stages, and this is far better sent through the post. All MSS. coming into an office are read and are judged on their merits, irrespective of their origin. A famous name is the only thing that will sell a contribution that is unsuitable or second-rate.

When, however, the freelance has had one or two contributions accepted by a particular journal, he or

42 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

she can consider asking for an interview with the editor. This should be done in advance by letter or telephone. The contributor should come bringing, not seeking, ideas. It is a good plan to work out two or three ideas and have them clearly in your mind, ready to sketch them briefly and attractively, if the editor asks, as he usually will, whether his caller has in mind anything for the future. A typed synopsis of each of these ideas should also be prepared, but not produced unless the editor expresses interest in the verbal summary.

A personal call of this kind has a double value: it may be the immediate means of placing material already completed; but far more important, it establishes that personal contact which is the foundation of all durable business relations. The beginner should remember that first impressions have a way of being lasting. He or she should study carefully the method of approach, the manner, the dress even, to be adopted. Over-self-confidence or bashful timidity can both make a bad impression. A pleasant manner is always an asset, so long as it is backed by solid worth, but any attempt to exploit feminine charm, for example, is foredoomed to failure. That may possibly be the way into Hollywood studios, but it is not the way into a solid freelancing connection.

Nor should the visitor do all the talking. He will be wise to listen to what the editor has to say, judging as well as being judged—assessing the editor's character and temperament, gleaning hints on his likes and dislikes, seizing and storing away any ideas or suggestions that may be thrown out in conversation. And when the interview is over—it should not be prolonged—every moment of it should be gone over

in the visitor's mind, while impressions are still fresh, and anything of value noted down for future reference.

If, as the result of such an interview, the freelance is invited to submit one or more contributions, these should be forthcoming promptly. Editors must always plan well in advance of publication; much magazine work is seasonal. Any delay in the delivery of invited material may prejudice its chance of being used. A reputation for promptitude and reliability is almost as valuable to the freelance in building up a connection as the reputation for producing uniformly good work.

For when editors have learnt that they can rely on a particular contributor they will often be prepared to commission work in advance, based on suggestions put up by the freelance himself or on ideas of their own. This is a great time-saver for the writer; it marks, too, the end of the hit-or-miss, trial-and-error phase, and the beginner who gets thus far can consider that, although there can be no relaxing, the worst is, perhaps, over.

One form of contribution which is almost always commissioned in advance is the series. Freelance writers are often advised to "think in series", and the advice is sound. When the beginner has an idea for a series of articles which he thinks would fit in with the policy of a particular journal, he should write a preliminary letter to the editor, outlining his idea and offering to submit a detailed synopsis and a specimen article. The advantages of the series are firstly that at least one market is assured for a number of weeks or months, and, more important to the beginner, the reputation-making power of the series is much greater than that of the same number of

44 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

single articles. It is the best way of securing the coveted status of "one of our regular contributors".

The closest connection that the freelance can attain with a periodical, without giving up his freelance status and becoming a salaried member of staff, is to be invited to conduct a regular feature, such as a post-bag in which advice and information are given in reply to readers' queries, a household hints or gardening page, a column of book reviews, or the like. Such feature-work is discussed in Chapter 9.

On the question whether the freelance, at the outset of his career, should make use of the services of a literary agent to find markets for his work, opinions differ. Many writers, especially those with little business sense or of a retiring disposition, have found this assistance most helpful and continue permanently to leave the disposal of all their work in the hands of a trusted agent. On the other hand, since the freelance must sooner or later study the markets for which he hopes to go on writing, he might as well do this from the start, and by seeking out new openings for himself broaden his knowledge and save an agent's fees at the same time. To work through an intermediary robs the freelance, also, of that interesting and stimulating personal contact with editors of which we have spoken above. In the end, the choice must remain very much a matter of temperament.

The Business Side of Freelancing.

The buying and selling of literary material is as much a matter of business as the buying and selling of potatoes or any other saleable commodity. That it has other, less commercial, aspects makes no difference to the fact that the business side must be

approached in a businesslike way. As soon as the freelance begins to make money by his pen he must keep regular accounts and records.

For this purpose he will need at least two books :

- (a) A record book in which a note is kept of all MSS. sent out and the ultimate fate of each.

The Writers' and Artists' Year Book suggests the following lay-out for such a record book.

Date	Name of MS.	Where sent	Accepted or Rejected	Date	Payment Made		
					£	s.	d.

An alternative method, and one to be preferred perhaps by the freelance with a fairly large output is the card-index system. A card is made out, on the lines of a library catalogue, for each MS. and on this a record is kept of its progress until it is finally sold—or shelved.

- (b) A book containing detailed accounts of income and expenditure. This is required not only so that the freelance may measure his own progress, but also to assist him in making accurate returns to the Inland Revenue authorities.

46. TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

Space will not permit a full treatment here of Income Tax law and practice as it affects the freelance writer. But two points must be made clear. Earnings from literary work are subject to tax in the same way as earnings from any other source. It has been ruled that even money received from the outright sale of copyright is assessable. Reliefs can, however, be claimed for a very considerable range of expenses, which may include the following :—

1. Typing and secretarial fees.
2. Repairs to and renewals of typewriter.
3. Stationery and postage.
4. Rent, rates, lighting, heating, etc., of rooms used solely for literary work, or a proportion of such expenses for the whole house if the writer works at home.
5. Travelling expenses necessarily incurred in literary work.
6. Renewal of reference books.
7. Periodicals necessary for the author's work.
8. Subscriptions to journalists', authors', playwrights' or composers' societies.

The freelance who is just beginning to earn money by his pen will do well to consult the Technical Advice Department of his local Inland Revenue office. It is better to place the whole matter on a satisfactory footing from the start than to let it slide and find oneself faced later on with a heavy and unexpected claim which one may find it difficult either to meet or to dispute.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN SEARCH OF IDEAS*

SUCCESS in freelance journalism calls for a constant flow of bright, fresh, topical ideas. There is always a market for brightly written, "meaty" articles, full of odd facts about familiar things, or with some new slant on a well-worn topic, or giving the reader a fresh insight into the events of everyday life. The essence of good article-writing lies in the linking of the unknown to the known, the new to the already familiar.

If the freelance possesses one of those grindstone brains which can throw off sparks of originality at every turn, he is fortunate indeed. With most writers, however, inspiration flags at times and the mind calls for some outside stimulus.* Nor can those who have ideas work them out successfully and convincingly without some other resource than their own inventive genius. The most handy and reliable source of new ideas and supporting facts is the printed word.

Ideas from Books, Newspapers and Magazines.

There is no copyright in facts. Once a fact has been made public in print it becomes public property, and may be used again by another writer, so long as it is not presented in the same form. One writer may make use of the same basic material as another—since the same sources of information are open to both—but the use that any writer makes of material must be his own.*

* For details on the law of copyright see Chapter 16.

The freelance in search of ideas should, therefore, read widely. Every issue of a daily newspaper contains news paragraphs, letters, advertisements even, which will suggest ideas for topical background articles or gossip paragraphs or short stories. Back numbers of magazines provide another "happy hunting ground", for what has interested one generation of readers may well interest another, once the material has been given a new twist and brought up to date, or what was originally presented as topical may be used as the basis for an article on the manners and customs of former days.

Many freelance writers make good use of their local reference library. The germ of an idea has perhaps come to them and they build it up, as we shall see in the next chapter, by collecting material from recognised authorities on the subject. And often, in seeking material for one article, the writer stumbles upon ideas for many others. The freelance should make the fullest use of the library facilities available, learning to find his way about in his library, mastering its system of classification and cataloguing, knowing in particular where to find those volumes containing collections of odd facts about people and things which are a godsend to the article-writer. He should remember, too, that any book not on the shelves can be reserved for him or obtained, under the regional library system, from another library. A word of warning, however: time spent with books and in the library must be used purposefully and to advantage. The temptation to browse vaguely and for its own sake must be firmly resisted. An afternoon can soon slip by thus with little or nothing accomplished. It is hard for a book-lover to refrain from following up

an enquiry beyond the point where it is likely to be of use to him, but refrain he must, or his output will fall away sadly.

Ideas from People.

Valuable as is the printed word as a source of ideas, much of the human material out of which the best articles and stories are made has never been written up in books or in newspapers even ; it is to be found in the lives and occupations, the minds and hearts of the men and women around us. Everyone we pass in the street has at least one story worth the telling, or knows something that others would be interested to hear. Because they are not writers, themselves, that story will never be told, that something will never be made known unless the journalist, freelance or professional, draws it out and records it. To get ordinary folk, many of them shy, inarticulate, suspicious even, to talk about themselves, their ideas and their experiences, their hopes and fears, is one of the most valuable skills that the journalist can possess. We need look no further than the famous "Have a Go" programme to see how this flair can be turned to enormous popular advantage. To possess it one must learn to understand people, all sorts of people ; and true understanding comes only from a genuine liking for one's fellows.

Other qualities are required, too. A quick imagination which recognises at a glance the man with the story or the story that can be made out of the man ; acute powers of observation that will note the salient features of manner, appearance, dress, environment, tricks of speech, and the like ; and a retentive memory that will hold these, as well as details of

conversation until they can be conveniently noted down ; the knack of getting others to talk freely while oneself saying little ; the art of being a good listener.

Interviewing.

Every freelance writer should study carefully the technique of interviewing. Whether one's " subject " is a celebrity or some man or woman in the next street with an interesting experience to relate, the interview should be planned carefully in advance ; it is extremely risky to rely on the inspiration of the moment.

The interviewer should decide :—

- (a) exactly what he wants to know,
- (b) the method of approach most likely to win the confidence and co-operation of his " subject ",
- (c) some at least of the specific questions he is going to ask.

This art of questioning must be learnt. The best results are secured by framing questions in such a way as to enable the person interviewed to give the information one requires with the least trouble to himself. When dealing with shy or inarticulate people, it is often helpful to imagine what they must have felt or done in the circumstances concerned and put this into the form of a question that can be answered by " Yes " or " No ", " That's right " or " No, what happened was this . . . "

Whether or not to take notes during an interview is a problem which often worries beginners. Many people are put off by the sight of a note-book in which all they say is being taken down. On the other hand, it is often of the greatest value to have an exact

record of what was said during an interview—where the person interviewed later denies having said something, for example. The best plan is to keep the note-book well out of sight at first, introducing it casually at a later stage if this can be done without danger of bringing the interview to an untimely close. A good “verbal memory” is worth many note-books.

Ideas from Personal Experience.

The third source of ideas is one's own personal experience—memories of things seen and done in the past—and a keen observation of the world around one at the moment.

Beginners are often apt to think, because they have not been to the far corners of the earth or taken part in world-shaking events or moved in circles where every other person met is in *Who's Who*, that they have nothing worth writing about. This is a great mistake. Most of us have a far wider acquaintance with the world than we sometimes realise. Contacts made and experience gained at school and work, in social intercourse and on holidays, during a period of military service in war or peace, all broaden our outlook and knowledge and provide a storehouse of information and ideas upon which we can draw in our writing. The true art of the journalist, and of the writer generally, is not to tell vivid stories of startling novelty—such stories will generally tell themselves—but to see the significant and the universal in the simple events and experiences of everyday life, to select and present what will be of wide

* For a full treatment of the art of interviewing the reader is referred to the companion volume *Teach Yourself Journalism*.

general interest from what was primarily the concern of one person or the few. Most professional writers and journalists, with the exception of a few colourful personalities, are simple, hard-working folk, differing from their fellows only in their sharper powers of perception, a deeper insight into the human heart and a gift for putting into powerful words "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed"

Storing Ideas.

Although rich veins of material for articles and stories lie around and within us, this ore must be mined and stored ready for immediate use when required. The freelance writer must be constantly alert to see the value and significance of all that comes his way; he must also be systematic in recording what he discovers or observes. Some methods of storing ideas are the following:—

(a) **The Cuttings File.** Every newspaper office maintains an elaborate file of cuttings from its own and other papers, arranged and classified for easy reference, so that up-to-date information on any subject can be obtained in a matter of minutes. Naturally, the freelance writer will not need anything so elaborate as this—nor would he have time to maintain it—but it will pay him to adopt some simple system of keeping cuttings from newspapers and magazines dealing with topics in which he is interested.

There are various methods of keeping such a file. The simplest is to have a number of large envelopes, each labelled with the name of some fairly wide topic, and to cut out, date, and place in the appropriate envelope any cutting bearing on that topic that

promises to be of value. If the freelance takes a couple of papers daily and one or two magazines a week, he will soon build up a useful collection of cuttings. This can be supplemented by buying bundles of old magazines from book-shops and libraries, or by asking one's friends to pass on newspapers and magazines for which they have no further use. As the envelopes become full, the topics they cover can be sub-divided and fresh envelopes used.

Another method is to clip the cuttings together in folders labelled according to subject-matter and arranged in a filing-cabinet in alphabetical order. Or each cutting may be first stuck on to suitably headed sheets of thin paper. Whatever method is adopted, it must be :—

- (i) simple and easy to maintain, so that it does not absorb too much time and become an end in itself, -
- (ii) systematic, so that whatever is sought can be found with the minimum of delay, and
- (iii) highly selective, so that what is likely to be of value does not become snowed under by an accumulation of useless lumber.

The writer will find a cuttings-file of this kind invaluable when he is in search of up-to-the-minute information to back up his arguments and ideas. It will also provide material which can be worked over again with a new twist or from a new point of view. And when inspiration flags and ideas refuse to flow, half an hour spent glancing through the file will suggest all sorts of possible openings for contributions.

(b) **Note-books.** When found," said Captain Cuttle, "make a note of." It is advice which the freelance writer will do well to follow. We have already said something of the note-book for recording Market Study. The writer should also keep a Suggestions Book in which he notes down ideas for articles and stories, a page for each suggestion with material added below as it is gathered. Every writer should also carry with him a pocket note-book in which he records ideas, impressions, information, the results of interviews, etc., while these are fresh in his mind. It is surprising how a vivid note taken at first-hand and on the spot, can add life and reality to what is later written up at one's desk. This is why so many news-stories include the impressions of an eye-witness given in "quotes".

Material from the pocket note-book not used immediately can be entered in the Suggestions Book. Note-books, like the cuttings-file, should be kept systematically, with an index at the front of each to show its contents. When full, note-books should be stored away for future reference. In this way, the freelance writer will be building up his own reference library of facts and ideas, all the more valuable because it has been compiled from his own study and observation, and to meet his own needs.

Specialisation.

The freelance will find the task of gathering material for his work easier if he is prepared to specialise. This means selecting a field in which he is interested and studying that field until he becomes something of an authority. This cannot be done in a day. It requires years of patient application to master all

there is to be known in even the smallest sphere of human activity. The man or woman who wishes to write with authority and to be heard with respect on his or her chosen subject, whether it be old china or rugby football, civil aviation or cosmetics, must put in a deal of hard work, reading up the text-books, studying past history and present trends, getting to know the recognised authorities or exponents, looking at the matter from all angles and studying it at all levels.

But the advantages for the freelance which come from specialisation make the effort well worth while. It is always easier to write fluently and well on a subject we know thoroughly and in which we are deeply interested. Every fresh development can be recognised at once as such by the expert, so that he does not waste time writing up material which will be rejected because it is already familiar to readers. A market for his writing, too, is more assured, for an editor is quick to mark the contributor who really "knows his stuff". Faced with two articles on similar themes, he will choose that by the writer whose knowledge and reliability in this field he has learned to trust. Moreover, editors are often ready to pay much higher rates for material from acknowledged experts, while the freelance specialist, once he has become known, may find himself being commissioned to write articles on aspects of his speciality suggested by editors themselves. He may even be offered a staff appointment on one of the magazines or journals catering for his particular interest.

However far his specialisation may carry him, the freelance will certainly find work of this kind more

56 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

interesting and congenial, and probably far less exacting, than general writing with its ever-present risks of wasted effort and flagging inspiration. It is a course which every freelance should consider, once he has mastered the rudiments of his profession.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TECHNIQUE OF ARTICLE-WRITING (I)

Planning the Article

IN the last chapter we discussed the sources from which the freelance writer can draw his ideas. We now turn to the actual task of planning and writing an article.

Let us suppose that the writer has the germ of an idea—given to him by something he has read, some person he has met, or some experience he has undergone, or merely thrown up by his own inventiveness. When the idea first occurs to him he will note it in his Suggestions Book and, unless it is so topical as to demand immediate handling, he will leave it for a day or two; it is surprising how “brain-waves” are seen in better proportion after a lapse of time. If he is still satisfied that the idea has something in it, he can set about planning the article.

His first task will be to decide on the angle or point of view from which he is going to approach the topic and the market for which it is to be written. Either may determine the other. Thus, he may have a bright idea for a seasonal article and will look round for a suitable market, or he may have in mind a magazine or type of magazine for which he wishes to prepare a seasonal article if he can find a suitable idea. But whichever comes first to his mind, the two must be taken together in planning and writing the article. To write an article and then look round

for a market is to invite failure, or at least the added labour of revision.

Having decided on the angle or treatment—and freshness and topicality are all important here—the writer can now begin gathering his material. If the subject is one in which he has specialised, his task will be easier for he will know where to turn for the information he requires and will be able to distinguish the new from the hackneyed and familiar. When approaching a subject for the first time one is wise to read it up a little before attempting even a short popular article, since ignorance or amateurishness is all too obvious to the initiated, who will undoubtedly inform the editor. The sources to which the writer will go for his material will depend upon the nature and length of the article and the market for which it is intended. Thus a contribution for a woman's magazine on "The Children Next Door" would require less research than a centenary special for the local daily entitled "A Hundred Years Ago Today", and this again might call for less consultation of authorities than a "paper" for a literary review on, say, "Hamlet's Successor to the Throne of Denmark".

The material cannot be worked up into an article in the form and order in which it has been gathered. It will need selection and arrangement in an orderly plan. An example of such a plan is given in the Article Analysis in the next chapter. The order of the ideas must be a logical one: all that belongs together being placed together so that the train of thought runs smoothly from beginning to end and the reader does not lose his way: everything which does not contribute directly to the point and purpose

of the article being excluded. Miscellaneous collections of odd facts may be suitable for a Ripley's "Believe It Or Not" strip, but they do not make an article. Facts must be linked together in related groups or used to illustrate ideas, while ideas themselves must be arranged in a logical sequence to form a train of thought. Shape and design are as important in writing as in any other kind of craftsmanship.

The Importance of Accuracy.

There is one more task before the actual writing of the article can begin. Every scrap of material the writer proposes to use must be carefully checked. For one of the cardinal principles of sound journalism is accuracy. "Check your facts", and "When in doubt, leave out—or find out" are maxims every cub-reporter and every freelance beginner must take to heart.

The best safeguard against inaccuracy is the constant use of reference books. The professional journalist can consult these in the library of his newspaper or magazine office; the freelance can usually find what he wants in the Reference section of his Public Library. But a journey to the Public Library to check every point of detail can be a vexatious waste of time. The freelance should, therefore, have on his desk copies of the more essential works of reference. Here is a minimum list:—

- A Dictionary. One which gives spelling, pronunciation, meaning, usage and origin. e.g. the *Concise Oxford*.
- An Encyclopædia. A one- or two-volume affair will do as a start, but as funds permit, something more ambitious, e.g. *Chambers's En-*

cyclopædia or even the *Encyclopædia Britannica* should be the aim. A good encyclopædia can be an invaluable source of ideas as well as a work of reference.

Whitaker's Almanack (yearly). Contains a wealth of up-to-date information.

The Writers' and Artists' Year Book. For information on markets, editors' and publishers' requirements, copyright, libel, income tax, serial and other rights, etc.

The Daily Mail Year Book. Contains a survey of the year's events, 1,000 brief biographical notes on people in the news, and much other useful information.

Fowler's *Modern English Usage*. The standard reference book on what is and what is not "good English".

To this minimum list the freelance might add the following, as he is able—:

An Atlas and World Gazetteer.

Roget's *Thesaurus*. A veritable treasury from which to enrich one's vocabulary.

Who's Who. Contains some 40,000 biographies of living celebrities.

The Concise Dictionary of National Biography. Gives a brief note (with dates) on a very wide range of outstanding figures in the nation's past.

Cruden's *Concordance*. Contains references to every word used in the Bible.

A Dictionary of Quotations (e.g. Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*).

Besides these general reference books, there are a number of more specialised ones with which the freelance should make himself familiar. These include :—

Debrett's and Burke's *Peerage*.

The Statesman's Year Book.

The Medical Register.

Crockford's (Clergy of the Church of England).

Who's Who in the Theatre.

Jane's *Fighting Snips* and *All the World's Aircraft*.

Grove's *Dictionary of Music*.

Bryan's *Dictionary of Painting*.

Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang*.

Willing's *Press Guide*.

The Question of Style.

It is quite common for a freelance writer who has gathered some interesting material to use it as the basis for three or four articles for different periodicals. The finished articles are quite distinct, being alike only in their common core of material. This very profitable practice is made possible by the fact that all periodicals do not publish articles of the same kind. The difference is largely a matter of *style*.

Style is easy to recognise but difficult to define. It is a way of writing, and its essence is appropriateness. The style must be suited to the subject-matter, to the purpose of the writer and to the mood and interests of the reader. And in periodical journalism the most important of these is the last. It is the editor's business to determine in the light of experience the kind of writing his readers like and to see that they get it. Similarly, the would-be contributor's business is to discover, by studying material already published, what style is favoured by each journal and to adopt that style in his own contributions.

Broadly, we may say that style is made up of the following :—

(a) **Length.** A glance through successive issues of any magazine will show that the length of articles and stories printed varies within very narrow limits. It is useless, therefore, to submit a 2,000-word article to a magazine whose usual article-length is 800. Adjustment of length is not a mere Procrustean business of cutting out a few paragraphs here or padding there. For if an article is to have shape and proportion, the length must be determined from the beginning and the material selected and arranged accordingly. The whole scope and sweep of the 3,000- or 4,000-word paper for a literary journal is different, quite apart from the language used, from that of the 1,000-word special for a local weekly newspaper.

(b) **Paragraph Length.** Although there can be no hard-and-fast rule here, it is surprising how consistently a periodical will follow a standard paragraph length. A contribution which conforms to this standard has far more chance of acceptance than one which does not. Much newspaper paragraphing to-day bears little relation to the true purpose of the paragraph—the full treatment of one aspect of a topic—for sub-editors have decided that their readers cannot take in more than one, or at most two or three, short sentences without a pause. Whatever his own opinion, the would-be contributor will be wise to conform to the practice. In magazine work, although the short paragraph is preferred, the divisions are usually more logical.

(c) **Sentence Construction.** This is a most important element of style. The short sentence, without qualifying phrases and clauses, makes for simplicity in description, narrative or explanation. A series of

such sentences imparts speed and momentum, a sense of urgency. The long complex sentence in which clause qualifies clause and the meaning unfolds itself slowly, is more dignified, more reasoningly persuasive. A judicious alternation of short and long sentences gives variety and a flowing style. The short sentence occurring amid a series of longer ones stands out in sharp relief. And so on. The student is advised to pay much attention to this matter of sentence construction, noticing the different effects which practised writers achieve with the short and the long sentence, with the simple, the multiple and the complex, with the loose, the periodic and the balanced.

Allied to sentence structure is word-order. The normal order of words in the English sentence is Subject + Verb + Object + prepositional or adverbial adjunct, with adjectival phrases and clauses placed next to the nouns they qualify. Any variation in that order will result in emphasising words moved from their normal positions, the most emphatic places in the sentence being the beginning and the end.

(d) **Diction.** Diction is the choice of words, the "language" used in a piece of writing. There are three elements in diction—correctness, effectiveness, appropriateness. Of correctness we need say little here; no writer can hope to be taken seriously if he is careless or ignorant about the true meaning of the words he uses. The secret of using words effectively is to have effective words to use; to have acquired such a wide and accurate command of words that one is able to select from a range of possibles the one single word which exactly hits off the shade of meaning one wishes to express. That, and the will to make the necessary effort, instead of taking the easy path of

the cliché, the hackneyed expression and the catch phrase.

Effectiveness of diction is closely linked with appropriateness, for the effectiveness of a word or phrase may depend largely upon the setting in which it is found. Just as we vary our dress and behaviour according to the occasion, so there is a language, a diction, a style appropriate to different purposes and moods. Only careful study of the market beforehand will enable the freelance to adapt his choice of words to the requirements of that market.

(c) **The Writer's Attitude to the Reader.** This will do much to determine the style in which he writes. Thus, a superior, condescending attitude may result in that "writing down" to children, for example, which sends so many otherwise promising contributions to juvenile magazines into the waste-paper basket. Nor must the writer assume that his reader knows too much or the reader will be annoyed by having his ignorance exposed. Phrases such as "For the sake of those new to this subject . . ." or "Readers will remember that . . ." or "It is common knowledge that . . ." may be used when one is uncertain how much to take for granted.

How far to intrude oneself into one's writing is yet another problem. When and how often should the personal pronoun "I" be used? How far should writing be subjective and how far objective? This will, of course, depend largely on the nature of the subject; the ultimate decision must be a matter of good taste, always remembering that, although the reader likes authoritative writing, he is more interested in what is said than in the person saying it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE TECHNIQUE OF ARTICLE-WRITING (2)

Introductions.

EDITORS are busy people. Many of them receive hundreds of contributions every week, mostly quite unsuitable for publication. They learn to assess the merits of a MS. very quickly. The fate of any contribution, therefore, will depend largely on the first impression it makes, in other words on the quality of the opening paragraphs. And this is as it should be, for the reader today, faced with a flood of reading matter from which to choose, is unlikely to persevere with an article which fails to make an immediate appeal, unless it happens to be on a subject in which he is already interested.

The essence of a good opening is that it should arouse the reader's interest. It need not, as should the news-story intro., contain the main facts of which the remainder is an amplification, but it must arrest the attention so that the casual reader, glancing through the pages of the periodical, will be induced to read on. Among suitable devices are the following:—

- (a) The personal, topical or historical anecdote which leads into the subject of the article.
E.g.

When I asked my seven-year-old niece what she would like for her birthday, she said "A little hat-shop!" I scoured the toy stores in vain and, not wanting to disappoint Elsie, I decided to make one myself.—"How to Make a Miniature Millinery Shop." (*Housewife*.)

- (b) The striking fact of the "did you know?" order. E.g.

December sets Tristan de Cunha, Cocos, Keeling and other remote corners of the Commonwealth agog for other reasons than Christmas alone. It may mean the coming of the only mail of the year, and unkind weather can interfere even with that. —"Marvels of the Mails." (*Eritannia and Eve.*)

- (c) The quotation. This should be used sparingly and only if the quotation is really striking and appropriate, and likely to go down well with the type of reader. E.g.

Do you remember, in Barrie's *Dear Brutus*, how Margaret, the dream child, speaks with pride of her dimple, and her father retorts "I wore out the point of my little finger over that dimple"? Fortunately, the mother of an ordinary little girl, who is no dream child, is not expected to go to those lengths in these busy days. But most of us do want our daughters to grow up as well endowed with good looks as may be possible.—"Growing up Pretty." (*Housewife.*)

- (d) The last example also illustrates another effective device, the personal question addressed to the reader. "Have you . . .?", "Do you . . .?", "Can you . . .?"
- (e) The short arresting general statement which gives promise of bright, forceful writing to come. E.g.

The dim, smoke-laden atmosphere of a cabaret—a spotlight trained on the singer or dancer—gives most people a thrill.—"Cabaret." (*Queen.*)

- (f) Breaking into the middle of some action or event, so provoking the reader to discover what it is all about. E.g.

It was about half-past five when the call came through "Where's Dick McMillan?"—"Dunkirk." (*Inky Way Annual.*)

- (g) Where the topic is of sufficient interest in itself to make artifice unnecessary, it is better to plunge straight into the subject. E.g.

From Fleet Street's point of view, a notable feature of the episode of the abdication of King Edward the Eighth was the continuous watch kept by a great company of reporters and photographers on Fort Belvedere, the King's country house near Virginia Water, from December 3, when the matter of the King's projected marriage first came into prominence in England, until the time when it was certain that he had left Portsmouth in the destroyer *Fury* on his way to France in the early morning of December 12.—"The Watch on the Fort." (*Inky Way Annual.*)

Or

In these days very few people, I suppose, receive Valentines, and yet the giving of them was a pretty custom. The cause of their disuse is obvious.—"Good Morning to You, Valentine."
(*Britannia and Eve.*)

An introduction should be simple, direct and smooth-flowing in style. Any unfamiliar words or difficult, involved sentences will repel the reader; few people like to be made to think hard, especially when they are reading for pleasure.

Titles.

Many writers declare that finding a suitable title is often more difficult than writing the article. For it is the title that first catches the reader's eye. While the first paragraphs decide whether or not he will read on, the title determines whether he will pause at all in his scanning of the pages. A title must arrest the

reader's attention and at the same time reflect truly the contents of the article. Dull, heavy or lengthy titles repel the reader, but misleading titles disappoint and antagonise him. Wherever possible, a title should be linked to something in which the reader is already interested.

The student will learn much by going through his Market Study note-books and analysing a large number of article-titles, noticing particularly :—

- (a) The topics and the aspects of topics in which people are interested,
- (b) The devices used to link up with those interests, and
- (c) The style of wording employed.

Much valuable material for study can be obtained from the headlines of such brightly subbed newspapers as the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail*. We give below a selection of titles from recent magazine issues showing a variety of styles:

Making Marriage Work.

What to Do About "Scary Dreams".

Reporting the Royal Wedding.

Fanciful-Like.

"We Won't Make No Mess".

Suiting Yourself.

Surviving Links with Charles Dickens.

Not a Thing to Wear.

The Finest Horse that ever Raced.

Children's Party Season.

The Chinese Thought of It.

Good Morning to You, Valentine.

Wives Who Work.

You Never Quite Knew.

Quick and Easys for Two.
 A Victorian Child's Bookshelf.
 The Time I Fired Myself.
 An Innkeeper's Wife.
 Old Time Travelling—de luxe and otherwise.
 Growing Up Pretty.
 If . . .
 An Old-fashioned Bedroom.

And three series titles

Famous British Shops.
 The Married Lives of Famous People.
 Shakespeare's Heroines.

All these titles have this in common—they were calculated to stir the interest or curiosity of their magazine's typical readers.

Conclusions.

Conclusions are important, for they make the last impression left on the reader's mind; it is on the effectiveness of the conclusion that his final judgment of the article is based. The editor, too, as he reads the last page of the MS. is making his decision, to publish or not to publish—always supposing the article is good enough for him to have got so far.

The conclusion must be conclusive. The reader should never need to turn the page to see whether there is more to follow, nor should he, at the end, be left in doubt of what the writer wishes to convey. We give below the concluding paragraphs of some of the articles whose introductions were quoted above :—

The whole cost was just over three shillings as most of the oddments I already had in the house. The miniature millinery shop has thrilled Elsie and given

her hours of pleasure.—“How to Make a Miniature Millinery Shop.”

A potted biography of Britain's G.P.O. would record it as the biggest bankers of citizen savings ; its staff is over 300,000, administering 24,000 P.O.s, handling almost 8,000,000,000 letters and parcels a year, including the December seasonal boost, when even the Zoo receives seasonable offerings from people who wish to remember the animals which have given them pleasure during the year. The salary of the first P.M.G. in 1545 was £67 a year. "Today's chief receives £5,000, and the organisation he controls (unparalleled anywhere, though imitated throughout the world) has grown from a handful of dispatch riders who risked life and limb against thugs and highwayman back in the time of Charles I.—“Marvels of the Mails.”

The one thing cabaret can never be is anæmic.—
“Cabaret.”

Dunkirk was over. The restless, roving search for news turned elsewhere. We didn't know—then—that we had helped to cover the greatest single story of all.—“Dunkirk.”

Throughout that momentous time there was at every likely point the same dogged watching, the same uncertainty as to the facts and the possibilities ; the same need to go on making bricks without straw to satisfy insatiable news-editors. An experience to live in the memory of anyone who shared in it as a most unsatisfying business made tolerable by the warm good fellowship of the rest.—“The Watch on the Fort.”

There are many ways in which the effect of finality can be secured. Among these are :—

- (a) the summing up and recapitulation of the ground covered,
- (b) the driving home of a point made,
- (c) some unexpected twist to throw into relief all that has gone before,

- (d) the saving of the most striking, surprising or "telling" piece of information as a tit-bit for the last,
- (e) a short anecdote illustrating the general point of the article,
- (f) a neat or witty turn of phrase, which gives the article a sting in the tail,
- (g) taking up again some statement made earlier in the article which has gained added significance by what has intervened.

Unity.

For the purpose of study we have isolated here the various elements of style in article-writing ; in actual practice these are not separate items but are all parts of one unified whole, threads woven together into the texture of the completed composition. The material used, the words in which it is expressed, the length, the paragraph divisions, the sentence structure, the title, the introduction and the conclusion, the illustrations also, are all matched and blended so that each fits in with the rest, and the whole is appropriate to the periodical for which it is intended.

It is this suiting of the parts to the whole and the whole to its setting which gives that air of competent efficiency, of polished "just rightness" to the work of the practised writer ; it is the jarring effect on the reader's mind produced by a failure to observe internal unity which so often mars the work of the beginner.

ARTICLE ANALYSIS

After reading through the article reprinted below and studying the analysis which follows, the student

should make similar analyses of a wide range of published articles, particularly of the kind he himself wishes to write.

SHEPHERD OF THE FELS

By **SYDNEY MOORHOUSE**

It seems a far cry from a Lakeland dale to those days when the shepherds of Old Judea watched their flocks on the plains around Bethlehem and saw the star in the eastern sky that heralded the birth of a Saviour. But when the choristers of the village church walk along the frost-bound road, and the words of the old shepherds' carol echo down the valley, two thousand years pass in an instant.

If anything has retained a sense of permanence in a changing world, it is the life of the shepherd. Now, as in ancient Palestine, the flocks have to be tended, and if, in this Lakeland dale, the farmers have no fear of the wolf or other large animals, the sheep still have their enemies—not the least of them the wandering fox.

It is difficult to think of anything more in keeping with the Lakeland scene than the sheep. Around them the entire life of the dalesman revolves. Bank Holidays mean less than the traditional times for lambing, dipping, shearing, and so forth. Even the shepherds' carnivals are based on the annual sorting of stray sheep and the autumn hiring of breeding rams. And if Christmas brings a day or two of respite, the link is still there—the great spell that binds the twentieth-century shepherd to those who watched their flocks two thousand years ago.

Many a shepherd I know will be keeping an anxious eye on the great fells during the brief Christmas liberty. Snow was a grand part of the Dickensian Christmas, but Dickens' characters were never shepherds. Now, at Christmas, he looks towards the fells, and so long as Helvellyn, the Scafells, Skiddaw and the rest are standing stark and clear, he has no immediate worry, even should an early spell of lambing fall hard upon Yuletide and New Year.

There have been sheep on the fells from time immemorial. The most typical breed of these parts is, of course, the Herdwick, the lithe, grey; agile creature which is found in the Lake Country and nowhere else in the world. From time to time experiments have been made in the hope of inducing the Herdwick to establish itself in other hill districts, but always without success.

Yet, in spite of this affinity, it is doubtful whether the Herdwick is a true native, for the most popular belief is that its ancestors were introduced by the Viking settlers of a thousand years ago. Writing in *The Secret Valley*, Mr. Nicholas Size tells us: "The Norsemen seem to have brought their sheep, a small, black breed, with wool which made waterproofs, but is now less valuable, through mistaken efforts to breed it white. The animals are wonderfully hardy, and the lambs are very pretty. They are generally born darker than their mothers, and become whiter as they grow older." If this is so, then the Herdwick has at least been with us long enough to have established its affinity.

Herdwick sheep are "heaf-bred", that is, always brought up on one particular section of fell, and therefore imbued with a tendency to remain there and even to return there if disposed of to other farms. It is this tendency to remain on its own heaf that is responsible for the custom whereby the sheep still belong to many of the Lakeland landlords, and when a change in tenancy occurs, they remain behind to be tended by the incoming tenant. In the schedule are details of the flock, and at each change-over, the new tenant receives the identical number of ewes, wethers, shearlings, hoggs and tups as are mentioned. Any increase is, of course, his own property, as are the profits from the sale of the wool during the course of the tenancy.

Because of this policy, the National Trust, one of the biggest landowners in the Lake District, is now one of the largest owners of Herdwick sheep in the country, for when farms have come into its possession, sheep, as well as land, have become Trust property.

But whether Herdwicks, Rough Fells or Swaledales be the breed used, sheep farming on the Lakeland fells makes great demands on the stamina of the farmer or shepherd. With sheep runs extending over anything from 10,000 to 15,000 acres, and the necessity of rounding up the entire flock at least twice a week, it will be seen that the Lakeland shepherd is capable of walking feats that put those of the average tramp or fell-walker to shame. Hill sheep need this constant attention, for losses are greater than in the case of flocks in the downland or pastoral regions. Evening sends them to high ground, where they lie out on the upper slopes, and hot weather makes them seek the shelter of rocks and walls and high bracken. That makes their finding a difficult task and, indeed, it would be an impossible one were it not for the assistance of the well-trained sheepdogs.

Summer, then, wet or fine, brings its anxious moments to the Lakeland hill farms. So does winter. Digging out buried sheep is a regular part of the Lakeland snowstorm, but the Herdwick is a hardy creature, and has been known to survive for days, and even weeks, in a buried condition. Near the head of Eskdale one severe winter storm resulted in an entire flock of 97 sheep being buried, some under 15 feet of snow. Yet the dogs worked wonders in pointing them out, and only two of the 97 perished. The severe weather of early 1947, too, caused fewer losses among the Herdwicks than among any other variety of mountain sheep.

Lambing, generally, comes later than in the counties further south, and while odd youngsters can be seen any time after Christmas, it is not until April that the majority are about. Lambing is perhaps less hazardous than it used to be. The ewes are brought to the pastures near the farms, and remain under constant supervision. Time was when the special lambing shepherd came along and lived in some bothy while the youngsters were born. He had special cures and remedies of his own, and at this time of the year was given a free hand. Now, however, the flockmaster or shepherd moves among

the ewes as little as possible, as it has been found that disturbance has an adverse effect on the offspring.

Throughout the summer the lambs will thrive on the fells, and the Herdwick, true to its faculty for behaving differently from other breeds, will eventually change its black face and legs for the grey shades of its parents.

Meanwhile the sheep will have been gathered and clipped, and in August many of the gimmers and wethers will be disposed of, save for the gimmers that will be kept to replace those ewes that have grown too old for breeding. In autumn come the ram-hiring fairs and sales, and in late October and early November the shepherds' meets, when strays are brought to the sorting-pens and reclaimed by their rightful owners, and all unite for song and drink at the nearby hostelry. But already the tups are running with the next season's mothers. The cycle of the shepherd's life continues. Season, indeed, runs into season, month into month, the sheep the focal point of it all, and Christmas still sends the age-old shepherd's carol resounding through the dale, to bridge the gap of 2,000 years.

ANALYSIS

TITLE : " Shepherd of the Fells ".

AUTHOR : Sydney Moorhouse.

PUBLICATION : *Holly Leaves* (Christmas number of *Sport and Country*).

DATE : Christmas,

READER APPEAL OF PUBLICATION : Sport, the countryside, country life.

LENGTH : 1,250 words.

SUBJECT : Life and work of the Lakeland shepherd, with Christmas tie-up to the shepherds who " watched their flocks by night ".

ILLUSTRATIONS : Twelve photographs by J. Hardman, with caption and thirty-word description to each.

ANALYSIS OF SUBJECT-MATTER :

I. Introduction. Tie-up with Christmas shepherds.

6 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

2. Unchangeableness of the shepherd's life.
3. The sheep are a central part of the Lakeland scene.
4. Even Christmas brings its problems to the Lakeland shepherd.
5. The typical Lakeland breed of sheep is the Herdwick.
6. The origin of the Herdwick breed.
7. Herdwick flocks are "heaf-bred", i.e. attached to one district.
8. Sheep-farming in Lakeland makes great demands on farmers and shepherds.
9. Perils of winter.
10. Lambing season.
11. Summer on the fells.
12. The completion of the shepherd's year. Christmas again.

MARKET : The writer, who knows Lakeland life intimately, has chosen a market likely to accept an article on his subject. He has given the article an ingenious tie-up for a Christmas number. The length conforms with the practice of the magazine.

TREATMENT : This magazine is intended for the general reader interested in country life, rather than for the specialist. Hence the treatment is non-technical ; information is imparted palatably, facts being alternated with description. There is considerable knowledge and research behind the article, but it is carried lightly.

STYLE : There is unity of subject-matter. The paragraphs, although fairly short, represent real divisions of the topic. There is a clear thread of thought running through, and the linking of paragraphs is admirable. The sense of unity and compactness, of the wheel coming full circle, is enhanced by taking up at the end the note struck at the beginning. The diction is appropriate, giving the impression of a countryman talking the language of the countryside, and yet all is readily intelligible to the ordinary reader. The writer does not obtrude himself, but an occasional " I " adds a note of authenticity.

Above all, the general effect is harmonious—market, season of publication, title, introductory tie-up, subject-matter, treatment, diction; illustrations, all blend together into a competent piece of magazine journalism.

ILLUSTRATIONS: These were excellent, and undoubtedly did much to sell the article. Action photographs rather than studio portraits or landscape studies, they served to bring the life of the Lakeland shepherd vividly before the reader.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FREELANCE NEWS-GATHERING

What is News ?

THE nature of news is a favourite subject of discussion among journalists. Some place the emphasis on one aspect, some on another, but it is generally agreed that the essence of news is topicality, novelty and general interest. To be news an item of information must have a bearing on the affairs of the moment, it must be new to those who hear or read it, and it must arouse the interest of a considerable number of those hearers or readers. Items which possess these qualities to a marked degree are often spoken of as "hard" news, and are given priority by those who select and arrange the contents of the paper.

The art of news-gathering calls for a highly developed sense of news-values. To acquire this sense the journalist must have a wide acquaintance with men and affairs, a sound educational background and a very considerable stock of general knowledge. For it is only thus that he will be able to distinguish what is new from what is already generally known, and what is of topical interest from what is of little concern to the majority of his readers. And this knowledge he must keep constantly up to date by being himself an assiduous reader of newspapers and magazines.

Above all, he must have his finger on the pulse of current thought and public opinion ; he must be

aware of what the great mass of men and women around him are thinking and feeling ; he must never lose " the common touch ", for although he himself may move in a circle whose interests are specialised, what he writes must appeal to that common denominator of his fellow-citizens, the man in the street.

Methods of News Collection.

The collection of news has become a highly organised business. There is hardly a corner of the world today which is not covered by the gigantic network of news-gatherers employed by the local and national newspapers and the great news agencies.

Very briefly, the system operates thus. Local news is collected by the reporters and district representatives of provincial newspapers, and by the local staff correspondents of the national dailies. Events of national importance are covered by staff reporters of the national dailies and by special correspondents of both the national and provincial Press. In addition, home news is reported by district correspondents of the news agencies, notably the Press Association, the Exchange Telegraph and Central News. Foreign news is gathered by Reuters news agency and by the foreign correspondents employed by the national dailies and some of the larger provincial papers. Items of interest to particular sections of the community (e.g. trade and technical news) are gathered by a number of smaller news agencies operating in different parts of the country.

It can be well imagined that little of importance slips through this finely meshed net. What oppor-

tunities, then, has the freelance journalist in this much-tilled field of news-gathering?

Scope for the Freelance News-Gatherer.

A useful analogy may be drawn here with the holding down of enemy territory by an occupying force in the days before the introduction of mechanised forces. A soldier could only "occupy" the ground on which he actually stood, or the area within range of his rifle. So in news-gathering, local reporters and staff correspondents cannot be everywhere at once. Where many meetings, sporting events and other happenings overlap, any of which may yield an item of acceptable news, not all can be covered by staff men, and the alert freelance may secure a market for his reports.

Much news, too, is unpredictable. The freelance may find himself the only trained journalist on or near the spot when a good story breaks and can turn his luck to good advantage. The essence of success here is, of course, speed. He must secure his story and get it away before the avalanche of staff reporters and correspondents descends on the scene, for when they do he will not be able to compete, on his own, with the superior resources upon which they can draw.

There is a third type of news with which the freelance has more chance of success than with any other, and that is the news story he finds for himself. It is here that a keenly developed sense of news values—a nose for news—can be so valuable. Sometimes the skilled journalist owes his discovery of some exclusive story—a "scoop"—to a kind of sixth sense, an intuition that something out of the way is

going to happen in a setting which on the face of it promises nothing but humdrum normality. Perhaps one of his "contacts" may have dropped a hint which he is wise enough to follow up. Or perhaps the very juxtaposition of people and events promises a flare-up, an out-of-the-way happening, some departure from the usual and the expected.

Finally, every good journalist knows that, when all other resources fail, it is sometimes possible to *make* news. By this we do not mean that the journalist himself throws a bomb at the assize judge's car or creates a disturbance at a temperance meeting. But by skilful writing up he may make acceptable copy, if not strictly "hard" news, out of most unpromising material.

Building up a Connection.

If he is to turn his talent for news-gathering to the best advantage, the freelance must build up a connection among newspapers prepared to accept his contributions. This is not so difficult as it may seem, for although a newspaper employs a staff of representatives to collect news, it is usually very ready to accept items of genuine news value from whatever source they may come.

The freelance must remember, however, that if he is to become a regular contributor of news reports he must satisfy certain conditions. The foremost of these is reliability. He must earn a reputation for unimpeachable accuracy; for let him once send in a story which has later to be corrected or denied, or, worse still, which involves the paper in an expensive libel action, then he need expect no more encouragement from that quarter. It behoves the freelance,

therefore, as indeed it does every journalist, to check and double-check his facts, including dates, times, figures, places, names, initials, titles, and addresses. He should be careful to seek corroboration for any story which comes to him at second-hand ; there are many people about who, from a misplaced sense of humour or for their own personal ends, try to secure publicity for stories of their own invention.

Next to accuracy, the freelance must earn a reputation for promptitude. News is ephemeral—the most quickly perishable of all commodities, and it must be handled with speed if it is to retain its value. A story submitted in time for the early editions of an evening newspaper when the flow of news is slack may be worth a two-column spread. As the day goes on, and more news comes in, it may be worth only one column, half a column, be relegated to the away pages or crowded out altogether. It is true that some papers are prepared to pay regular contributors for a story which has merit even though it is not used, but the payment will usually be much higher if the story comes in early enough to avoid being “spiked” in favour of more urgent copy.

A third quality which the freelance journalist must display if he is to build up a regular news-gathering connection is personal integrity. Such breach of faith as the selling of stories given to him on the understanding that they should not be published, the attempt to palm off on editors stories which have little foundation in fact, the selling of “exclusives” to more than one editor at the same time (even though their circulation areas do not overlap) can only end in eventual exposure and the drying up of useful sources of income.

Many freelance journalists, especially those living in country districts and the smaller provincial towns, where staff correspondents are not maintained, find it an advantage to secure the status of accredited correspondent to one or more of the national daily or Sunday papers. Even though such an appointment may not carry with it any salary or retaining fee, it will secure readier acceptance for any stories submitted and a statement, on visiting cards or business note-paper for example, that he is an accredited correspondent will often gain for the freelance a standing which might otherwise be difficult to acquire.

In this connection the requirements of the technical and trade press should be carefully watched. Even in areas where general news is thoroughly covered by the local press and by staff and agency correspondents it is often possible, particularly if is a specialist in their field, to become the local representative of one or more of the trade papers, attending and reporting on their behalf all meetings, shows, exhibitions, etc., in the district likely to be of interest to their readers. Such work is not as a rule very highly paid, but in the aggregate can form a useful addition to income.

Indeed, there are freelance journalists who make a living by the collection of trade and technical news and the writing of special articles thereon. One enterprising freelance even succeeded in working up a flourishing news agency which does nothing else but distribute information about proposed new building schemes to the trade and technical papers directly or indirectly concerned with the building industry.

The procedure the freelance should follow is this. Having decided on the directions in which he proposes to specialise (see p. 54), and having studied copies of the trade papers concerned, he will begin by submitting news items, of a similar length and style to those being published, of relevant events, personalities or developments in his own district. When he has had one or two accepted by a particular journal, he may then write asking whether the editor is prepared to appoint him as his local representative. Details of any qualifications (a university degree or diploma, membership of the appropriate professional society or association, practical experience) should be mentioned, and copies of special articles or news items already published might be enclosed.

Provided the paper is not already represented in his area, such a request will usually be readily granted, ~~and~~ it is in every editor's interest to secure as complete a national coverage as possible.

Yet another market which the freelance should keep in mind is the increasing number of House Magazines being issued by the larger industrial concerns. Although news published by these journals is usually concerned with internal affairs, items of more general interest to the industry as a whole, as well as special articles, are often accepted from outside contributors. In some instances, the payment made for such contributions is quite high.

There are, therefore, numerous opportunities even for the beginner in freelance journalism to take a share in the never-ending search for news which is the chief business of journalism. But he will need to be alert, resourceful and a tireless worker if he is to make this his main source of livelihood. Most

freelance writers will prefer, if they are wise, to leave news-gathering to the staff men, and concentrate on those fields where their particular talents are likely to meet with a readier reward.

CHAPTER NINE

FEATURE WORK

THE contents of each issue of a newspaper or magazine may be divided into two sections : the items—news, stories, special articles, etc.—which are peculiar to that issue, and the items which are to be found in a similar form (and usually in the same place) in successive issues. These last items are known as “features”. Naturally the actual content of a feature will be different from issue to issue, but the framework, the idea of the feature will remain the same, often for many years.

Indeed, many readers turn first to their favourite feature, and it may even be that for the sake of some particular feature they buy that paper or magazine rather than some other. Widely used features in both newspapers and magazines include the post-bag or Letters to the Editor, the gossip column, the readers' queries, children's corner, fashion and beauty hints, literary and dramatic criticisms and book reviews. Realising that on the quality of its features depends very largely the individuality and drawing power of any periodical, editors are at pains to maintain the highest standards in the material they publish.

Opportunities for the Outside Contributor.

Nevertheless, it is in those features which make use of material sent in from outside that the freelance may often make a beginning in newspaper and magazine journalism. The reason is this. Those

who conduct such features—gossip columns, for example—are often hard put to it, to provide their readers with a constant supply of bright, lively and stimulating ideas. Consequently, anything at all promising coming in from outside is most welcome. And since such contributions are by nature short, any amateurishness or unsuitability in the writing up of a fact or idea can soon be put right in the office.

The beginner looking for experience and anxious to see how his or her writing looks in print—even if there is no payment for it—might well make a start with the correspondence columns of newspapers and magazines. Writing letters to the editor on topics of interest suggested by news items is excellent practice for article-writing. Now and then periodicals anxious to build up a lively letter-bag feature will offer payments of from five shillings to a guinea or more for all letters printed. The essence of successful letters to the Press is the same as that for a good “talking point” article—to seize on the universal in one’s own experience or views or ideas.

Letters should be kept short—about 100 to 150 words—and the central idea should be put across tersely and convincingly, without any artifices of style or beating about the bush.

Unlike letters to the editor, contributions to a gossip column are always paid for. The rate varies but the average is about half a guinea a paragraph. “Hard” news is not required for this feature; what is wanted is the background story *behind* the news. If you can supply some interesting fact about a person or place in the news at the moment, some precedent from the past to parallel a happening of the moment, some incident from the experience of

88 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

yourself or your friends to corroborate or explain a news story, then this is the sort of material the conductor of a gossip column is looking for. Study the usual paragraph length of the periodical you have in mind (about 200 words is the average) and polish up your contribution so that it carries its meaning in the fewest possible words. In no branch of journalism is compact, economical writing so important. When considering such a contribution ask yourself "Should I or my friends be interested to read this if it were written by somebody else?"

Those responsible for the Woman's Page and the various women's features in the magazines are usually very ready to accept contributions from outside sources. Cooking recipes, household "wrinkles", beauty hints, fashion notes, helpful advice on house furnishing, child welfare, simple ailments and accidents, suggestions for holidays in the summer and entertaining in the winter (remember the time factor here) are always likely to find a market. Payments may be small, but can mount up. And to be earning while learning is a good proposition, however small the rewards may be. The freelance who has had a number of small contributions of this kind accepted is only one step removed from being able to weave several together into a saleable article.

In Chapter 13 we shall deal more fully with the technique of writing for children. But it may be noted here that as the newsprint situation improves, the Children's Corner is reappearing in many newspapers and magazines from which it was banished during the war. Much of the material used is written inside the office or taken from one of the syndicates, but there is often room for contributions from out-

side, especially if they embody a really new idea. As usual, it is a question of studying the market and producing something original which will fit into an existing pattern or framework.

Conducting a Feature.

The actual running of a regular feature is, of course, a very different task from sending in contributions, however frequent. This is no job for a beginner; indeed, many newspapers and magazines place their more important features in the hands of experienced and trusted members of their regular staff.

It is, however, quite usual for a freelance to be entrusted with some types of feature, especially by the weekly and monthly magazines. How are such appointments obtained? Usually, in one of two ways. Either a freelance journalist has become well known to an editor by reason of frequent contributions to his and other papers on a particular subject, so that when the editor is looking for someone to take over a feature bearing on that subject this writer's name will come to his mind and the job will be offered—especially if the writer has previously dropped a hint that he or she would be glad to do this kind of work if the opportunity occurred. Or a feature may be offered to a person who has already made something of a national reputation in the field concerned—has become a “name”, is the term used—so that the feature will attract readers because of the drawing power of the person conducting it. The freelance seeking to secure a feature may take his choice of these two methods of achieving his aim!

What are the qualities an editor looks for in the freelance to whom he is considering offering the con-

duct of one of the features in his journal? Once an editor has established a feature he has, so to speak, contracted with his readers to ensure that that feature shall be there in each issue; to break faith with them, would be to forfeit their confidence and support. An editor expects that this sense of obligation shall be shared by whoever takes over the actual running of the feature, so that, come what may, the required amount and standard of material shall be on his desk in time for inclusion in each issue.

Absolute reliability is, therefore, an essential qualification for feature-work. The temperamental genius, the author who writes only when the inspiration moves him, the type of person who collapses under the first touch of illness or adverse circumstances and then argues, "Well, what could I be expected to do in the circumstances?" is no use here. The duty of the feature-writer to his readers is akin to that of the stage artiste to the audience. Punctuality is, of course, a part of this reliability. A contributor who keeps an editor on tenter-hooks as to whether his stuff will arrive on time or a day or two after everything else has gone down to the printer is not likely to be left long in possession of a feature. The maintenance of a uniformly high standard, a conscientious resistance to the temptation to make do with second-best material now and then, is something else for which the editor looks.

And finally, discretion. Much feature-work (replies to correspondence, gossip-writing, reviewing and criticism, for example) is intimate, and personal, touching closely the lives and work of individuals. It is, therefore, particularly open to attack on the score of libel. As we shall see in Chapter 16, the scales in the law of

libel are weighted heavily against the writer and although the principle of "fair comment on matters of public interest" gives a reasonably wide protection, there are many pitfalls which beset the unwary. Magazines and other periodicals have all copy carefully "subbed" in the office, but an editor is much happier if he knows that his features are in the hands of experienced journalists who know the ropes and are in the habit of watching their step.

The Letter-Bag.

The letter-bag or post-bag is a feature of most periodicals, but its nature varies very considerably. In the newspaper it consists usually of printing a selection from the many letters sent in to the editor by readers and members of the public generally. The feature is conducted by a member of the staff and calls for considerable skill, not only in avoiding trouble but also in maintaining general interest and ensuring that the letters shall be as representative as possible of the life of the community. Magazines usually place their letter-bag feature in the hands of an outside contributor, and it is here that the experienced freelance of the right type may gain a footing.

The letters received in a magazine post-bag cover a wide range of general knowledge, but those involving personal problems and asking advice on what are called "women's interests" predominate. Such features are generally offered, therefore, to women, although male journalists have sometimes been very successful in this work.

The qualifications for taking on a letter-bag of this kind [writes Ursula Bloom,* who herself conducts a

* *The A B C of Authorship* (Blackie & Sons).

number of such features] are that you have to know people well ; you must be something of a psychologist, quick to grasp a situation, to sympathise and to stimulate. The power of stimulation is possibly the most important item of them all. And you must have at your finger tips a store of general knowledge.

A post-bag feature soon takes on something of the personality of its creator and can often be a great asset to the periodical in which it appears. It can also keep a writer's name before the public in a way that a series of single articles or stories will never do.

Film and Dramatic Criticism.

This is a type of work in which many freelance beginners have an ambition to engage. Film notices, in particular, look so easy to write that every magazine which does not run a column of such notes is constantly besieged by offers to "do their films". In ~~an~~ actual fact, of course, film criticism, and still more dramatic criticism, is a highly specialised art calling for much knowledge and experience. There is undoubtedly scope here for the freelance, but only after he or she has, by patient study and much intelligent and thoughtful film-watching or play-going, qualified for the work. The apparent ease and the sureness of touch of a C. A. Lejeune or an Ivor Brown are not learned in a day. The beginner with leanings in this direction is advised to offer his or her occasional services to a local paper—unpaid if necessary—to gain experience. Then when a wider opportunity presents itself, some evidence of work already done can be produced.

Book Reviewing.

The columns of book reviews, reduced to a minimum

during the war, are now expanding once more. Much of this work is in the hands of outside contributors, the custom being to hand over a column of fiction reviewing to a regular reviewer, and to pass over non-fiction, technical and scientific books to individual specialists. About a dozen novels a month is the average assignment, although the reviewer is not always expected to notice the whole twelve.

Payment for the reviewing of novels—except to the acknowledged masters of the art—is not high; about half a guinea a book is the rule. In addition, one keeps the copies of the books reviewed, which can often be sold in the second-hand market. Specialist reviewing is better paid, up to two guineas for a single review being quite common; evidence of expert knowledge in the subject is essential to secure this type of work.*

Miscellaneous Features.

Editors of newspapers and magazines are always ready to consider suggestions for new features which will add interest to their pages and so maintain circulation. Countryman's diary, a feature containing paragraphs of background notes on topics in the news such as the *Manchester Guardian's* "Miscellany" column, a Readers' Queries feature, notes on historical events and characters appearing under such headings as "100 Years Ago To-day", are examples, and a study of current periodicals will reveal many more. Such features, when surrounded by a lined border and used to fill up an odd corner of the page, are known as "box features". The freelance who

* For a fuller treatment of the art of book reviewing see the author's *Teach Yourself Journalism*.

has an original idea for a feature, or interests lying along an already well-trodden path, should seek out a periodical which, while making a practice of running features, has not anything of the kind he has in mind. A letter to the editor "building up" the suggestion and enclosing a couple of specimen contributions will often secure a contract.

Particular attention should be paid to local newspapers, for here the competition is less keen, both from inside and outside the office.

Not all features are intended to be carried on for long periods. Editors are often prepared to consider a short series of articles written round a single theme. Thus a local paper might publish a series dealing with notable characters in the history of the neighbourhood, or on places of historical interest, or on local natural history. In the same way, national newspapers and magazines will run a series on "The Childhood of Famous Men", or "Marriage Customs from Many Lands", or "Queer Pets", and the like.

The writing of jokes and humorous paragraphs is another field in which the freelance can often add useful small sums to his income. Many newspaper and magazines publish a feature of this kind and welcome outside contributions. Each such feature tends to develop its own particular style and this should be carefully studied before material is submitted. Jokes with a topical or seasonal twist have most chance of success; ancient chestnuts are not welcomed!

CHAPTER TEN

THE SHORT STORY (I)

THE magazine short story looks easy. With its naturalistic dialogue, its smoothly flowing narrative, its everyday themes, it has an air of simplicity which makes payment for such "work" appear money for jam. It is this delusion which floods editorial offices with unusable material and produces in so many would-be contributors first surprise, then irritation, then despair as rejection slips succeed one another with unfailing regularity.

The truth is, of course, that the writing of short stories for the popular market today is a highly skilled craft calling for an ingenuity, a knowledge of human nature and a self-discipline which are not learned in a day. It is true that many, although by no means all, magazine short stories lack the depth of thought and the qualities of style which we associate with "literature", nor are many of them likely to enjoy anything beyond the brief life of the issue in which they appear. But they are good of their kind, written for a public which knows what it wants and is not easily satisfied with the second-rate. The freelance writer who thinks that, to save himself the trouble of gathering material for articles, he will dash off a story or two for the magazines is doomed to disappointment.

This is a disciplined form of writing. There is no room here in which to turn round, as there is in the novel. The utmost economy is called for, every

word, every gesture, every incident, every scrap of dialogue must pull its weight, making a full contribution to the story. Nor is there any place here for moralising, for the expression of the writer's own views, for descriptions and word-spinning for their own sake. Nothing must be allowed to impede the smooth and rapid flow of the story, from the interest-arousing opening to the effective and satisfying close.

In the short story there must be unity. To the reader it must be one'single and complete æsthetic or emotional experience. We do not lay a short story aside in the middle and come back to it; we take it at one sitting. It must have, therefore, an internal unity of its own, centring round one incident (however complicated), one person or related group of persons; its tone and style must be homogeneous; it must ~~move~~ towards one end which, if not foreseen, must appear when reached inevitable, warranted by what has preceded and leaving no loose ends.

It must produce, too, the illusion of reality. We must believe as we read that, given the people and the circumstances, this is what would happen. The story and the characters may be as imaginative as the writer pleases but both must be imagined into reality for the reader or the result will be dismissed contemptuously as "too far-fetched". There is much more to short-story writing, as we shall see, but these three characteristics—economy, unity and reality—are fundamental.

Elements in the Short Story.

Any examination into the elements which go to the making of a short story must take into account

character and plot. Which is the more important of these, however, is a debatable point, with much depending on the interest and temperament of the individual writer. Some begin with the outline of a plot and then seek for plausible people to whom this or that incident in it might be expected to happen; others begin with one or more characters that have taken possession of their minds and work out a set of events in which these characters take part. We start here with plot since so many of the stories submitted by beginners are rejected because of faults in plot-construction.

(a) Plot. There is a tendency today, especially among what are sometimes called "serious" writers, that is those contributing to the literary reviews and magazines, to regard plot as of secondary importance. Indeed, in many so-called "stories", whatever merits of characterisation and description they may possess, the story element is almost non-existent. Such literary exercises will not do, however, for the popular magazines with which we are mainly concerned here. The great majority of readers are still old-fashioned enough to demand that a story shall tell a story. The evolution of a satisfying plot is, therefore, a first essential.

Nor will it do to rest content with one simple incident which develops smoothly and without interruption from beginning to end. Complications must be introduced or the reader's interest will flag. Two or three times in its course the story must take a new turn, a fresh and unexpected element must impinge on the progress of events so that, although those events continue to march forward, they do not follow quite the path the reader had expected. And the

whole story must work up to an effective climax, preferably containing some element of surprise.

The essence of an effective plot is conflict. Obstacles, either arising from within the protagonists' own minds and characters, or created by external circumstances, are set up to hinder the fulfilment of some wish or plan or ambition and in the overcoming or removal of these obstacles lies the interest of the story.

The main theme of a plot need not be original—indeed, it would be difficult to find a completely new theme. The “boy meets girl” theme, the “eternal triangle”, and the “local boy makes good”, are perennial favourites and will probably remain so. What must be new, if a story is to find a market, is the way in which the theme is worked out. The setting, the people concerned, the attendant circumstances, the particular obstacles and complications introduced must be the writer's own contribution.

In seeking to build up and enrich the plot, however, the author must not allow it to become unintelligible. He must carry the reader with him each step of the way so that it is always quite clear what is happening to whom and why. The complications must be knit up closely into the main theme, the reason for the introduction of each minor character or incident must be immediately apparent. And not only must the reader be able to follow what is happening, he must believe in it also. He must never be driven to exclaim, “This could never happen,” or “It wouldn't have worked out like that.”

All this means that the writer must spend a great deal of time thinking over his plot before he begins to write. It may be possible to start a novel with

one striking sentence (as Howard Spring says he began *Shabby Tiger*) without any notion of what is going to happen next, but this will not do with the short story. This form has all the economy in materials, the interdependence of its parts, the complexity within a limited compass of a watch or scientific instrument

How to Find Plots.

The beginner who finds it difficult to evolve satisfactory plots of his own should make a careful study of the work of established masters, not with the idea of "lifting" their plots but in order to learn the secret of their craftsmanship. He should select a number of good stories of the kind he hopes to write and analyse these, making of each the kind of synopsis with which he thinks the writer may have started.

Once he has thus learnt something of the craft of plot-construction, he should find it easier to build up his own stories. The germ of a plot may come from many sources. A new angle on an old theme may be suggested by an incident reported in the newspaper, by a personal experience of one's own, by something which has happened to a friend. Ideas for new stories will often come while one is watching a film or a play or reading stories by other writers. And once the seed of an idea has settled in the mind, if one has anything of the story-telling gift, it will germinate and grow, until it reaches the stage when it can be cultivated and pruned by deliberate art into a well-constructed plot.

This story-telling gift is, of course, the root of the matter. There is much talk of "machine-made plots", and it is perhaps possible to gain help from

"plot finders" and card-index devices, but such aids will not by themselves create a story. Unless the writer has the flair for conjuring up living people and making them move convincingly through a real world, then he or she had better turn elsewhere. Much can be learnt about the art of short-story writing, especially by the study of good models, but the root of the matter must be in the writer to begin with.

To the question "What can my story be about?" the answer is—with a few exceptions—anything, so long as the theme will be interesting to most readers of the magazine to which you are going to send it. The themes which are best avoided are those which are most likely to arouse animosity or distaste among possible readers. They are those touching religious or political controversy, the physical or abnormal aspects of sex, the morbid, the macabre and the depressing. And a story should be given a happy ending if this can be done with any semblance of likelihood.

(b) **Character.** We shall not be interested in a story unless we are interested in the people taking part in it. The characters in a story must, therefore, be brought to life for the reader and be such that he will be interested in and concerned about their fortunes. If characters are to live for the reader they must first live for the writer. It is not sufficient to mention a few traits of character and details of personal appearance. For a figure in a story to walk out of the pages with a life of its own it must be fully visualised by the author—invested with a past, a home background, with mannerisms and tricks of speech and behaviour, with strengths and

weaknesses of character. All this need not necessarily be revealed to the reader, but unless these things have been first conjured up in the writer's mind, the characters cannot be made to live and move naturally and with reality. The beginner who finds character-creation difficult should study Robert Ardrey's play "Thunder Rock".

Characters can be brought before the reader in various ways. Their appearance and qualities can be described by the author, or by other characters in the course of conversation, or they can be made to reveal themselves in what they themselves say and do. This revelation of character in dialogue and action is the method usually adopted in the short story as being the most economical. It enables the writer to keep the story moving and to reveal character at the same time, thus achieving that economy which is the essence of short-story writing. Moreover, information passed on to the reader thus indirectly and in passing is apt to be more convincing, for it is how we formulate an opinion of new acquaintances in real life. It is permissible, however, to allow particularly the chief characters some self-revelation, so long as this is done in accordance with current convention. Thus the soliloquy as used by Shakespeare would be considered crude today, but an author may achieve the same results with a sentence beginning "He wondered whether he ought to . . ." or "All that day she kept asking herself whether she should . . ." Characters, once established in the reader's mind, must remain consistent, they must continue to act "in character".

Beginners often ask whether they should draw their characters from life. The answer is "Yes—and no".

The laws of libel make it dangerous to depict any living person of one's acquaintance so vividly as to be recognisable. On the other hand, unless one draws from nature, one's characters will become artificial, stilted and "literary". The best plan is to build up composite characters, taking physical characteristics from one model, traits of character from another, tricks of speech and manner from a third, and so on. Some effort should be made, too, to give characters names which will fit with the part they play in the story.

(c) *Setting*. Events cannot take place in a vacuum. There must be a location or setting, in which the story happens. In selecting a setting for a story there are two factors that the writer must bear in mind. Firstly, it must be appropriate to the story, so that the story may carry added conviction and the general ~~tone~~ and atmosphere be maintained. Secondly, the beginner at least would be well advised to write about places and ways of life that he knows well. Even the greatest masters have been apt to fail when they strayed outside the world they knew at first hand. Thus Dickens, for all his vivid imagination, could never depict convincingly the world of "high society". It is a mistake to imagine that familiar scenes will bore readers and that stories must always be set against an exotic background of luxury hotels or the Pacific islands.

What readers want is a good story about people in whom they can believe and become interested; they do not care where the story happens so long as the writer knows what he is talking about.

As with character-drawing, scene-painting in the short story must be introduced by the way. The

writer can seldom afford to devote space to the mere describing of the background, unless this is so vital as to become part of the actual story, as where the forces of Nature take a hand for or against the characters. The usual practice is to combine details of setting with narrative of action. Thus: "They were brought up sharp by the breath-taking beauty of the scene. The Sussex Weald lay spread out before them, a patch-work quilt of yellow and green and brown. Then, far below them, creeping along one of the ribbon-like roads they saw the red gleam of a moving car." And the story goes on again. Background can also be indicated in the course of dialogue which is, at the same time, revealing character or helping on the story.

We have said something of the three chief elements in the short story: plot, character and setting. What are the devices the writer uses to convey these to the reader? Again they are three: narrative, description and dialogue. All must be brought into play; their relative preponderance will depend largely on the nature of the story.

(a) **Narrative.** The straightforward relation, in the words of the writer, of what happened is the usual method used in adventure stories and those where the main interest lies in the rapid progress of events. In this type of story so long as the reader knows where he is and has a general idea of the sort of people involved he is content; it is the unimpeded flow of the narrative in which he is interested. Short, crisp sentences are best for narrative, for they have the necessary sense of movement and urgency.

But even in stories where the main interest lies in the emotional or psychological effect of events on the

characters there is a place for narrative. In this way the contributory events which produce the crises on which attention is fixed can be sketched in; the reader is told by means of narrative what he will need to know in order to appreciate what the chief characters are moved to say and do. The tendency of the beginner, however, is to use narrative more than he should. It is easier to adopt the rôle of the omniscient narrator than to set the characters speaking and moving and revealing *themselves* before the reader.

(b) *Description*. Something has already been said of the limitation placed on the use of description in the short story. It has its place, in making known the appearance and characters of the people in the story and the setting against which they play their parts. But it becomes more effective if it can be introduced in the words of or as seen by the actors *themselves*. Here is a description of one chief character in the story quoted on page 109, as seen by the other. Note the skilful way in which the "dossier" details are introduced.

He had never been on a job he liked less than this, of shadowing the suspect who was down in his notes as *Louise Browne (Miss)—Arrived from the United States. Aged nineteen. Occupation, travelling-companion and secretary to Mrs. van Thal of New York. Nationality British* (but French descent showed in the *chic* with which she wore that inexpensive street suit of Puritan grey). *Room Number 133.*

Where direct description is given by the writer, the utmost economy must be practised. Writers are by nature lovers of words, the power, the beauty, the "just rightness" of words cast a spell over them, and they are prone to indulge in description for the æsthetic pleasure it gives them and they hope it will

give the reader. This pitfall must be watched constantly by the short-story writer.

Extraneous ornament on the Victorian model is no more acceptable in the modern short story than it is in modern architecture. Words which do not earn their keep in furthering the unified design of the story must come out, however much fun or travail the writer experienced in gathering them.

(c) Dialogue. Good, crisp dialogue is the life-blood of the short story. It is on the quality of the dialogue as well as on the ingenuity of the plot that stories are bought or rejected. It behoves the beginner, therefore, to give much time and attention to the study of present-day practice and conventions in dialogue writing.

Dialogue, to be acceptable today, must be naturalistic yet selective, in character, and if possible witty. Naturalistic first. Gone are the days, if they ever existed, when real people talked as the characters do in Jane Austen or even Dickens or Thackeray. Beginners, steeped in the classics during their school-days, are apt to give a faintly literary character, an old-world artificiality to their dialogue which sets the editor's teeth on edge from the start. "Pray do this," or "Yes, if you please" or "Can this be true?" belong to another age, an age when people "rejoined", "vouchsafed" and "averred". It should be remembered, too, that there is not such a great difference today between the language used in conversation by different classes in the community as there was at one time. It is probably true that the private conversation of an Archbishop still differs considerably in style as well as content from that of a Billingsgate fish-porter, but the young bank-clerk

or hotel receptionist would often be difficult to distinguish by vocabulary and conversational style alone from the son or daughter of a peer or millionaire. Nor is there the same disparity in style between the young and the old—or at least the middle-aged.

But there are differences, and these must be faithfully reflected. Dialogue must be "in character". This applies not only to differences of class or age or occupation; it means also that people of different natural character must be made to reflect that character in what they say and how they say it. The flippant, the surly, the sententious, the business-like, the obsequious, will each be made to speak as the writer has observed people of that character do speak.

Although dialogue should be naturalistic it must also be selective. Actual conversation is almost always trivial, vapid and empty to a degree. If the reader doubts this let him take down in shorthand without their knowledge, exactly what is said during ten minutes by people sitting near him on a bus or by members of his family at home. Dialogue in a short story must do more than remain true to the words and phrases of real speech. It must be so selected as to make its full contribution to the revealing of character, the furtherance of the story and the depicting of setting. Every scrap of dialogue must have a further reason for being there than that this is the sort of thing people really do say.

A further advantage that dialogue has over narrative and description is that it breaks up the solid mass of print so that it becomes more attractive and palatable to the reader. It helps, too, to give the story life and reality; we are readier to believe in

the existence of people who speak to us for themselves instead of through a third party.

One aspect of dialogue which often worries beginners is the "he said", "she replied" problem. This difficulty can only be overcome by a careful study of the practice of skilled exponents of the short story. The student will soon notice that it is often possible to omit the attribution of a speech altogether, where it is clear who is speaking, or we may substitute what the speaker did as he spoke for the "he said" phrase. The writer will, however, be wise to have at his command a goodly armoury of the many verbs of saying in the language. It is possible to collect several hundreds of these, of which the following are a selection :

he (or she)	acquiesced	faltered	reasoned
	added	frowned	replied
	affirmed	gaped	resumed
	agreed	gained	retorted
	announced	groaned	returned
	answered	hesitated	screamed
	asked	hinted	sighed
	blurted out	inquired	sneered
	boomed	insinuated	stammered
	breathed	jeered	struck in
	broke in	laughed	suggested
	continued	lisped	threatened
	contradicted	moaned	urged
	cried	murmured	went on
	declared	nodded	whispered
	demanding	persisted	wondered
	demurred	pointed out	yawned
	explained	put in	

Further variety, again, can be secured by a careful choice of adverbs to follow these verbs of saying :

e.g. "she inquired vaguely", "he announced proudly", "she broke in breathlessly", "he persisted doggedly", etc.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SHORT STORY (2)

HAVING discussed in the previous chapter the principal elements that go to the making of a short story—plot, character and setting—and the tools that the writer has at his disposal to express those elements—narrative, description and dialogue—we now turn to consider how these are constructed together into the finished product.

If we wish to discover how a watch works or a flower grows we must pull it to pieces, noting how each part fulfils its function in relation to the whole. In the same way, in seeking to probe the secret of successful short story construction we must analyse an actual example.

We do not maintain—nor would the author—that the story printed below is so outstandingly brilliant either in conception or execution as to be likely to find a place in future anthologies as one of the greatest short stories of the twentieth century. But it is a competent, skilfully constructed and highly finished example of the type which is finding favour at the moment with that wide reading public whose brows are neither high nor low but who seek for entertainment which shall not be an insult to their intelligence nor make excessive demands on their powers of concentration. And this, we take it, is the type of story that most of the readers of this manual will wish to write.

WINDOW-SHOPPER

A Short Story by BERTA RUCK

Illustration by Frank Lea

PURPOSEFULLY but unobtrusively the big fair young man attached to the hotel staff made his way through groups in the vestibule, past the reception-desk, and towards the girl in grey.

He had never been on a job he liked less than this, of shadowing the suspect who was down in his notes as *Louise Browne (Miss)—Arrived from the United States. Aged nineteen. Occupation, travelling-companion and secretary to Mrs. van Thal of New York. Nationality British (but French descent showed in the chic with which she wore that inexpensive street suit of Puritan grey). Room Number 133.*

The two ladies had been here one week.

During that week pieces of jewellery had disappeared from the bedrooms to right and left of little Miss Louise Browne's.

That, in itself, was no evidence? But to his experienced eye there was something too quietly, neatly expert about the swiftness with which this young girl could slip in or out of rooms or along corridors, could disappear in the traffic of streets, through which he had stalked her, just as a little grey squirrel can vanish in a wood. Something fishy, too, about the concentration with which she gazed into shop-windows, *after* she seemed to have made sure that no one was watching her.

There she stood, now. Gazing into the millinery show-case near the revolving doors as if trying to decide which of two madly-expensive Paris model-hats to buy. . . .

That small intent face might have left nine out of ten men uninterested.

The tenth man found it fatally sweet.

But had he not, early in his career, been misled by crooks who contrived to convey just that impression of fresh, innocent soundness? Wasn't it humiliating to have reached his age and his present

position only to find that he had fallen—hopelessly, desperately—for a girl he might presently have to charge with theft?

He addressed her with a polite, intentionally-reassuring smile. "Did you wish to make inquiries of the milliner, madam? You would like to have the show-case opened?"

"I? Oh, no. . . . No, thank you," replied a soft startled voice. "I couldn't possibly afford——"

He was touched; then furious with himself—Sucker he was to feel touched at a little hypocrite's deprecating half-smile as she admitted, "I was only window-shopping."

After which she slipped aside, while he was left kicking himself because he couldn't make up his mind what *was* her game.

HER game, had he but known it! was—merely what she had said.

Hadn't she played it as a small half-French child in pre-war Paris, flattening her nose against the super confectioners of the rue de Rivoli, and, in fancy, picking out mouth-watering bonbons?

Later, gazing into the window of that world-famous perfumery off the rue de la Paix where a tiny crystal fountain sends up its jet of *Paris Soir*, she had promised herself scents by the lordly façon, "*Some day—when I'm rich.*"

Later still, in New York, as general serf to that travel-minded elderly, mean and wealthy widow, Louise had spent her grudging time-off before Fifth Avenue's seductive shop fronts selecting sheerest lingerie and softest, costliest furs. (Champagne tastes on a beer-income, or, say a cocoa-salary—Those were Louise's!)

In post-blitz London, where she had next to unpack her employer's mountainous steamer trunks, the window-shopper continued her game along Bond Street. Queen Anne silver, fragile Sèvres porcelain—ah, what delight Louise took in these treasures—not one of which her small fastidious hands had ever touched! "*Some day, when I can afford the best of*

everything," she dreamed "*I shall know where to go for it.*" Quite likely she got as much kick out of her window-shopping the unattainable as shoppers who are materially rich get out of their actual purchases? More perhaps . . .

From the London hotel's millinery show-case she "selected" dream-hats. The pert fur model would adorn an imaginary scene in which Louise, having won fifty thousand pounds in a football-pool (for she acquired this habit in London: weekly and hopefully she filled up those forms!) could afford to tell her skinflint boss exactly what she thought of her.

As for Romance in Black Lace with its sweeping brim, its mystery veil, its one great dark red rose, *that*, of course, was the hat to wear when she dined with her fiancé.

This figment of Louise's imagination had begun by being dark, slinky, cynical, typically Latin: a composite of lovers off the foreign films to which she occasionally treated herself. He was now, however, supplanted by a contrasting vision: typically Anglo-Saxon, blond, blue-eyed, with powerful shoulders, a re-assuring smile, he was what some people—who hadn't met women like Louise's boss—call "*gentle as a woman*".

He came off no film. He was "based" on the fair young man she had noticed moving leisurely about the vestibule, casually chatting to the assistant-manager, or lounging beside the reception-desk.

Secretly, innocently, continuously she dreamed of him. She made him a son of the manager's, here to pick up tips in the hotel-business before he was set up in a hotel of his, *their* own!—little suspecting that this dream-fiancé was in fact a hotel-detective who kept his eye on her, not only because he couldn't keep his eyes off her, but because he had put her down as a possible hotel-thief.

On the day that he spoke to her by the show-case she promoted him. He became a world-famous man-milliner who designed hats for beautiful royalties.

112 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

On that day, too, Louise started window-shopping for Christmas presents from each to each.

THERE were not many shopping-days left to Christmas the morning Louise's employer was found to have died in her sleep. Heart-failure.

In that upheaval Louise cabled, telephoned rich van Thal, relatives on both sides of the Atlantic. She was interviewed by doctors and lawyers, was kept frenziedly busy packing possessions, helping to sort papers. Then found herself perfunctorily thanked, shelved, left with half-a-month's salary and no prospects. It did not occur to Mrs. Van Thal's rich relatives to make any recognition of little Miss Browne's efficient, reliable, uncomplaining service.

For the last time Louise flitted out of the lift and across the vestibule.

Just before she passed through the revolving-doors she sent a good-bye glance around. That hat of dreams was still in the show-case. The man of dreams was not to be seen.

It happened that he was kept on certain investigations outside the 'notel for twenty-four hours. When he returned Miss Browne had packed and left—for what address nobody seemed to know.

No jewellery had disappeared with her.

He would not have liked to say whether this left him more humanly glad or professionally frustrated.

In any case he must get busy finding out where she'd gone.

By the time he had done so he had something worse on his mind.

Now Louise Browne had removed herself to a cheap boarding-house near the British Museum. Here she started to answer advertisements of "*Situations Vacant*"—and *Wanted*.

Her luck was out.

Either she was "*scarcely the type of young lady*"—or advertisers "*already had sufficient extra help for the anticipated Christmas rush.*"

Returning from yet another discouraging inter-

view she was told that a gentleman was waiting to see her in the lounge.

There, among inquisitive-eyed boarding-house spinsters and Hindu law students she found the man from the hotel—dropped out of her absurd and secret dreams. . . . *To see her?* Wild surmise filled her of dreams come true. . . . Impossible! Yet, there he was.

She blushed so vividly with delight and shock that he thought he had never seen anyone look so guilty. Ah, it was a bad show. Horribly bad; and with a leaden heart he produced his ostensible excuse for looking her up.

"This letter came addressed to you at the hotel, Miss Browne. So, as I had business in this street, I brought it along to save a post."

"Oh. Thank you." She did not even ask how he'd found out her new address? Her small hands trembled as she slipped the envelope into her handbag.

Upsetting. He must get the girl out of her hide-hole before they attracted more attention.

Quickly, quietly he suggested their going out to find some near-by tea-shop which wasn't yet milling with Christmas shoppers and have a cup of tea?

His heart sank down, down to see how that adorable little face of hers lighted up—for the benefit of boarding-house gossips of course—and how shyly she said, "Oh, I'd love to."

She'd every sign of the adept.

The tea-shop he had already spotted was just round the corner, and there was a suitably private table, disengaged, right at the back of the shop. He ordered tea for two—little guessing how often, already, he had given that order in the dreams of the starry-eyed girl opposite! He waited until it was brought.

Then, setting his teeth, he drew that clinching thing from his pocket and put it down on the table between them.

The long-drop earring sparkled where it lay.

His voice was hard as he told her, "This was found in room 133 after you'd left."

114 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

"In my room? Was it? But it's not mine."

"I know that." Because she must be hard as nails behind that innocent face, he made himself stone. "It was—cleverly hidden."

She looked at him inquiringly? Yet she must have tumbled that the game was up? Lord, she was brazen.

"Come," he said, sharply. "No doubt you know what my job is at the hotel."

"No?"

He told her, brusquely.

Then, since her eyes were still those of a puzzled child, he rapped out, "It's no part of my duties. But—you're very young: you don't seem to have friends. I saw the owners. The thing could be managed. If the other earring from room 132 were returned. And those two platinum-and-sapphire clips from room 134. No charge need be made."

A face as blank as an egg met his steady gaze.

A soft echo returned "*charge?*"

Then it was as if his meaning dawned on her.

"*You think I stole those things?*"

Suddenly, for no reason, he knew she hadn't.

She added, "*That's why you came?*"

The note in her voice woke in him instincts which joined his memories of all the caught-out-thieves he had encountered. Every instinct, every memory assured him that this angry young girl was no thief. Intuitively, in the way of a woman or of a watchdog, *he knew*.

Shaken, he began, "You must forgive me if I——"

She cut him short: "It's unforgivable." She was on her feet without troubling whether the waitress was within ear-shot, she threw at him, "If you do want to arrest me, you know where I shall be." She turned her back on him. Deliberately she walked between the little tables and out of the shop, leaving him in deepest disturbance to stare from that diamond earring to her untouched tea-cup.

BLINDLY, Louise made her way back to the dreary boarding house. She dashed upstairs to her icy

bedroom, and there, a'l in the shattered midst of dream-damage, she broke down.

Fool ! fantasy-addict ! Imagining that the dream-fiancé in the flesh had sought her out, brought a Christmas offering of diamond earrings—

"*Unforgivable ?*" She'd meant not ohly him but herself. . . . Oh, to get away, right away where she could forget everything and everybody in London that she hated. . . . Blindly she dragged her handkerchief out of her handbag to mop up her scalding tears. It was then that she found the forgotten typewritten envelope brought by That Man.

She tore it open.

Out of it dropped—that cheque.

She stared at it.

No. It was not a football-pool win ; but for something she had, in the recent upheaval at the hotel, forgotten.

Louise Browne (Miss) helped by her experience of window-shopping model-gowns had won third prize—Two hundred and fifty pounds.

OH, breath-taking gift from the gods, how joyously hay-wire Louise would have gone over it—this morning !

How horribly this afternoon had ruined everything !

Even this windfall hardly excited her.

Sensibly, unenthusiastically, she decided to open a banking-account—"And draw out just enough every week to keep me, carefully, until I land a job. Save the rest for a rainy day."

Dismal vista. . . .

NEXT day, she woke in a mood less defeatist.

Rainy day nothing. What about a sunshine-holiday ? Right away from this dump, from fogs, from London, from everything she meant entirely to forget ?

Snatch the glorious chance !

(She was, in both senses of the word, too innocent

to remember how this might give the impression of flight from justice.)

She was out of the house before the belated, Christmas-season-disorganized post came in. Consequently, she missed that morning's letter of distracted apologies from a hotel-sleuth.

During his absence that afternoon (he wrote) the mystery of those jewellery losses had been cleared up. Responsible for them was a hotel visitor, an extremely wealthy old gentleman who, all unexpectedly, turned out to be a "periodical kleptomaniac". His valet-male-nurse had explained to the management that at the end of such attacks his patient was in the habit of sending him to replace every article taken. A single diamond earring had in error been put into room 133.

"But will you believe me that *before hearing this I knew* that I had made a colossal and ghastly mistake?"

begged the letter (which did not mention all that had been done by a professional sleuth to save a suspect from trouble).

"I rang up your number at once, but was told that you seemed to be out. I will ring up again in the morning to ask if you could in spite of what you said, bring yourself to forgive me, and would perhaps let me see you again later to beg you to accept my apologies in person. I hardly dare to hope you will, but please do."

Very sincerely yours,
RONALD HARRIS."

That day was punctuated by his fruitless ringings up for Miss Browne.

MEANWHILE Miss Browne was fluttering like a moth in floodlight about London's crowded shopping centres.

Hugging the handbag which contained her passport, that cheque, the remaining three pound notes of her salary, seven shillings, and sixpence, she gazed

into windows of travel-agencies and studied posters for Europe's reviving playgrounds.

Her prize would run to an air-line ticket to these romantic places. She'd be allowed to take fifty pounds with her to the Swiss winter-sports, or the Italian Riviera. . . .

Strangely enough, she could not make up her mind which of them called her—or even if it really called. Nor could she decide what air-fuggage to acquire at that place in Piccadilly. She was uncertain as to the perfect travelling outfit.

Indeed, during the whole of that long morning's window-shopping her enjoyment was marred. By uncertainty? By echoes of yesterday. Hateful memories nattered at her heart. . . . Or perhaps she was just hungry after no dinner last night and half-tasted breakfast this morning?

Defiantly she treated herself to lunch at the late Mrs. van Thal's favourite restaurant; it started with a champagne cocktail to celebrate her luck.

This emboldened her to consider a shampoo and hair-styling at the big hairman's. So near Christmas?

Fortunately a client's appointment was being cancelled at the instant Louise ventured into the shop.

The result of the new hair-do encouraged the lurking idea of that new hat——

No! *Not* that hat in the hotel show-case.

Why not? Hadn't she always coveted it?

Why *not*?

And if—if by any chance she did in the vestibule encounter That Man, it would be a satisfying gesture to bestow upon him a casual airy nod. More withering than merely cutting him dead, she thought.

"Taxi!

THE hotel milliner purred, "The Black Lace Restaurant model with the red rose? Certainly, madam."

118 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

She recognised madam, and decided that witch van Thal must have been good for quite a legacy to the ex-slave.

The case was unlocked; the hat brought out. And for the first time in her life the window-shopper actually tried on something she had admired.

"Perfect for madam."

"I'll take it. I can't pay for it now, though——" For the price was twelve guineas, while all Louise had left in her bag was seven shillings sixpence and that cheque. "I'll call for the hat to-morrow."

"Madam mustn't trouble—let us send it for you, pay on delivery, first thing tomorrow morning."

"Oh—thank you," said Louise, struggling not to sound reluctant. (Twelve guineas, for a madly inappropriate hat.)

The nagging at her heart became a stab—
There! *Anything for the chance of seeing him again, and he wasn't even there. Serve you right.*

She gave her address and went, miserably, out.

EVEN as the revolving doors swung her into the street, young Harris up in his hotel bedroom was slamming down the telephone-receiver and telling himself, "Never going to BE any answer. I've had it." He shrugged himself into his overcoat and, morosely, made for downstairs.

In the vestibule the milliner who was an old ally of his re-locked the show-case and looked up as he appeared. "Friend of yours been in and bought this hat."

"Oh? Who?"

"Little Miss Browne."

(What——?) "When?"

"Only just gone. Catch her up if you step on it."

He was off; out.

The trim grey figure was no further away from the hotel than the top of the side-street. Having paused to glance in at the florist's window, she did not notice who strode up behind her. She went on, flitted

across the main street. He legged it after her, set upon catching her up——

STOP! ordered the traffic lights.

Fuming, he waited with the crowd at the kerb.

On the farther side of the road a thoroughly browned-off Louise sailed through a jostling crowd of just-before-closing-time shoppers. Winter dusk was well down; lights brightly up.

Round a corner, up an almost empty sideway she was dazzled; a window coruscated like Aladdin's cave.

Jewellery! It would be! Shan't want to look at any as long as I live.

Yet——

Yet, force of habit halted her gaze. Diamonds shot rainbow fire, sapphires made ocean-eyes at her. Deep-hearted rubies glowed over their reflections in a shelf of mirror-glass. *I'd have that lovely single emerald for my engagement ring, if——*

Here the dream snapped.

In that mirror glass she caught the momentary reflection over her shoulder of a man's face. Dark, foreign, type of her early dream-lover. Then things happened. Louise saw the movement of his raised arm, heard the crash as a brick wrapped in a stocking went through the plate-glass window—heard her own scream of "*Police!*"

Flinging herself forward she grabbed the arm of the smash-and-grab thief; she held on as a tiny, game dog might hold a burglar.

"Police! Help!"

Agonizing pain from her wrist, twisted . . . The Aladdin's cave blaze turned dark before her eyes as she was sent staggering against the wall.

Dazed, she heard shouts, the rush of a car, the squeal of brakes, running footsteps—all, worlds distant.

Then she felt the warm firm belt of an arm about her; and close to her a man's voice, a known voice asked, "*Darling! Are you hurt?*"

Four words that began life's new chapter for a

girl who up to now had known life's joys through shop-window glass only.

GLORIES were ahead ; still to come were congratulations from Scotland Yard authorities on the presence of mind and pluck shown by Miss Louise Browne in assisting at the capture of a much-wanted, tough, elusive criminal. Still to come, that " Christmas thank-offering " of an emerald clip from the jewellers she had saved from probably heavy losses. But what, to the girl in love, were these glories compared with the invitation (then and there in the middle of the milling crowd) from her man-of-dreams ?

" Will you ? Dine with me to-night ? "

Louise, only slightly breathless, answered with these unexpected words, " Will the hotel change a cheque for me first ? "

" I'll see to it." He beamed reassuringly down at her. " How much ? "

" I want twelve guineas," said Louise.

She intended to wear That Hat.

END

Theme. The theme here is clearly the age-old one of " boy meets girl " with a wedding as the " lived happily ever after " ending. We feel sure from the first sequence, indeed almost from the first sentence, that this is how it will work out, but we do not mind ; our interest is concentrated on the obstacles that beset their pathway to happiness. These obstacles constitute the conflict mentioned in the previous chapter, and it should be noted that there is a double conflict here—the external circumstances operating to keep the couple apart and the conflict between attraction and duty within the mind of the young house detective.

The Beginning. This is, perhaps, the most difficult part of the story to write for so much has to be

done in so small a compass. First and foremost, the interest of the reader must be caught and held. An attractive coloured picture beside and, around the title will help, but unless the reader glancing through the first few words is induced to read on the author has failed. But this is not all. At the same time the reader must be told something of what the story is about, where it is happening, who are the chief protagonists and to what nation and class and age-group they belong. The first few words should also set the tone for the whole story and start the action moving—and all this in the opening sentences.

The first sentence in our example does all these things. We are introduced to the two chief characters—the man and the girl. We learn quite a lot about the man: he is young, has fair hair, and is tall and well-built (notice the skilful use of the adjective “big” to convey this last), he holds a responsible position in the hotel without being a servant (*attached* is the operative word here). We are not told much about the other character except that she is young (“girl”) and that she is dressed in grey, which is a quiet, neat and unassuming colour. Bring two people such as these together in a hotel vestibule and the interest of the average magazine-reader is at once aroused. Moreover, the story begins to move, for the young man makes his way “purposefully but unobtrusively” towards the girl; he clearly has some very definite task to perform in relation to his hotel duties and yet he is determined to perform the task in a way which will not disturb the other guests. If we add that the corner of the vestibule near the reception-desk is to be the scene of several incidents

in the story it will be seen that the author has done pretty well for a first sentence of thirty words!

The reader should now, as an exercise, take the whole of the first sequence (the dots here replace the wide paragraph break and the enlarged capital letter of the familiar magazine lay-out) and write down a list of all that he has learned about the plot, the characters and the setting so far. He will find not only has he been told all that he will need if he is to understand the story which follows, but that the whole of that story has actually been stated in embryo.

After this first crowded sequence, which is related from the point of view of the man, the author can now indulge in some character sketching taken at a little more leisurely pace; this is devoted to Louise, who is to be her chief character and whose "window-shopping" world of make-believe must be made credible to the reader for on it hangs so much of the story. But just at the point when we feel we have heard enough of this, the story comes back, through her habit of creating a dream-lover, to the man at the hotel.

The next sequence is in marked contrast. Here things happen, and happen rapidly. Mrs. Van Thal is disposed of (she passes unwept, for the author has seen to it that we should not care for her), Louise leaves the hotel and disappears, and there is a hint that the house detective has worse discoveries in store for him.

In the fourth sequence, too, the story continues to move rapidly, and there are two changes of scene—the cheap boarding-house and the tea-shop. The cross-purposes of the girl's dreams and the man's suspicions culminate in the first crisis of the story—

"the long-drop earring sparkled where it lay". This first crisis is then worked out in detail, and the author wisely uses dialogue here for this is no moment for second-hand narrative.

How will the story continue now? Surely, thinks the reader, there must be mutual explanations and an end. It is at this point that the story takes a new twist. The letter, brought from the hotel, contains a cheque which promises Louise a way of escape from her disillusionment and distress.

During the next two sequences we watch the conflict of outside circumstances keeping the young people apart, although they are drawn from within more and more inevitably together. The incident of the hat, in the show-case in front of which they first met, is skilfully reintroduced. The pace of the story is now increasing rapidly as the final climax approaches. The man returns only a moment after the girl has left; he pursues her through the streets; her habit of window-shopping involves her in the smash-and-grab raid; he is there beside her and the emotion of the moment breaks down any remaining barriers between them. The climax once reached, the story is brought swiftly to an end, but even in this necessary tying-up of loose ends the author has one more card to play—we end, as we began, with That Hat.

It has not been possible in the course of our brief analysis to mention all the devices which have been used in the building up of this well-constructed story. It may be helpful, therefore, to summarise the principal devices of plot-construction in common use in the magazine short story today.

The chief of these is to enrich the plot with a number of minor crises before the final climax is reached—

corresponding to the end-of-Act "curtains" in a play. These minor crises must be carefully prepared so that, however startling or unexpected, they do not shake the reader's credulity. Thus in our example we are prepared for the arrival of the cheque by the earlier statement that Louise filled in football pool coupons. This placing of "signposts", pointing forward to something which will come later, is an important element in plot-construction. A statement is made or a minor incident is introduced which has some meaning for the reader at the moment (so as not to appear irrelevant) but whose real significance becomes apparent only when some later stage in the story is reached.

Secondary elements in the story should be cleared up in passing, and not left until the end. If too much explaining remains to be done after the final climax, the effect of this is greatly weakened. Only the loose ends created by the climax itself should be left for the closing sentences. In "Window-Shopper" the explanation of the thefts which had brought unjust suspicion on Louise is given in the house detective's letter, as soon as the incident is finished with, and well before the end of the story.

Another element which goes to the making of a successful plot is suspense. This is primarily the device of the "thriller" and the adventure story, but even where the main interest is centred on character and emotion the skilful creation of a desire in the reader's mind to know "what will happen next" has its place. An instance in our example is the sentence "By the time he had done so he had something worse on his mind", at the end of the third sequence. Part of the suspense aroused in the course

of the story is best left unresolved until the last, or almost the last sentence. It assists towards producing that final twist in the tail which is one of the characteristic marks of the modern short story—a device, akin to those used for securing applause in the theatre, which induces the reader to close the book with an exclamation of approval or satisfaction. “Very good, that. You ought to read it!”

A trick commonly used to hold the story together and give it a sense of unity is the introduction at intervals of a particular phrase or incident or object. The reader comes to look for it, just as the child waits for the recurrence of a repeated phrase in a fairy story or nursery rhyme. The hat in the millinery show-case serves this purpose in the example we have quoted.

In contrast with this recurrence of the familiar is the use of shock tactics by which the reader is suddenly jerked back to alert interest by the springing of a surprise upon him, in an arresting way. Thus the lengthy description of Louise and her dream-world in the second sequence is followed by a new paragraph beginning: “There were not many shopping-days left to Christmas the morning Louise’s employer was found to have died in her sleep. Heart failure.” Our flagging attention is at once recaptured.

In designing the plot the writer must take care that every detail is both possible and plausible. Questions which the alert reader might ask must be anticipated and the answers provided in the course of the narrative. The world of fiction is an artificial world after all, and readers will only grant what Coleridge called the “willing suspension of disbelief” so long as their sense of what is feasible and true to life as they know it is not outraged. Thus our author is careful to

explain why her heroine was able to get a hair-do without an appointment so shortly before Christmas and why she had already left the house before the morning post arrived.

We conclude with a few miscellaneous "Don't's" for the beginner to short-story writing.

1. Don't waste words. Use a word for a phrase and a phrase for a clause. Never mention the obvious. Imply facts rather than stating them in full.

2. Don't indulge in misplaced humour. Nothing falls flatter than humour which misfires.

3. Don't include anything which does not help on the story. Be particularly ruthless with pieces of description that you are rather pleased about.

4. Don't comment, and certainly never moralise. Let the story speak for itself.

5. Don't be sentimental. Father returning to his starving bairns through the Christmas snow froze to death in the blizzard of 1880!

6. Don't try to pass off character-sketches, "fragments" or exercises in description as stories. They are not.

7. Don't be careless with grammar, punctuation and spelling.

8. Don't steal details for your plots—invent them.

9. Don't start writing your story until you have prepared (a) a rough draft, and then (b) a detailed synopsis of the plot.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WRITING FOR RADIO

"THE radio field is, par excellence, the field to be studied by the young author of promise who has so far failed to achieve recognition," wrote Val Gielgud ten years ago and this is still true today. Here is an exciting new medium in which there is still plenty of room for experiment and in which the newcomer will find the competition far less keen than in newspaper and magazine journalism. That is not to say that the standard required is lower, but as the B.B.C. is seldom prepared to pay inflated fees the really big "names" often prefer to turn their attention elsewhere.

Contrary to a very common belief there is no close ring of writers beyond which the B.B.C. is reluctant to stray. That most writing for radio is done by a comparatively small group is because most would-be contributors will not take the trouble to learn the technique of this very specialised medium and continue to submit material which, although suitable enough perhaps for the printed word or the live theatre, would never sound well over the air. The B.B.C. is constantly on the look-out for new writers and for suitable material. Every script sent in is carefully considered; indeed, anyone sending in a MS. to Broadcasting House, either in London or the Regions, will find that more time and courteous attention is given to him, even though his script may be

rejected, than he would ever receive from a magazine editor.

The Technique of Writing for Radio.

Before discussing some of the opportunities in this field open to freelance writers it will be well to make clear in general the ways in which writing for radio differs from other literary forms.

The fundamental distinction, from which everything else follows, is, of course, that radio scripts are written to be heard and not read, the appeal is to the ear and not to the eye. Everything must be clearly and simply expressed, making an immediate and effective impact on the hearer; for there can be no repetition of what has not been fully grasped, no turning back or reading over again as with the written word—no pausing, even, on the part of the hearer to take in what has been said, for to pause for a moment is to miss the next sentence also and so to lose the thread altogether.

The language used, therefore, must be direct, concrete, familiar, the language of well-informed conversation. For a script must never sound as though it is being read. It must give the impression of spontaneity or it will fall dully and heavily on the listener's ear. We all know the talk by the scholarly worthy on the Third Programme which does not need the audible crackle of the typescript to remind us that it is being read. Sentences should be kept short; inverted and involved constructions, polysyllabic words difficult to pronounce and jingling repetitions of the same word or sound should be avoided. The great secret is to "hear" everything for radio as it is being written and then to read it over aloud,

altering or removing anything which presents difficulty to the reader, or offends the ear or strains the attention of the listener.

The limitations, too, of the medium must be borne constantly in mind. Gestures and changes in facial expression can often help to convey meaning in normal speech. Thus a harsh or critical remark can often have much of its sting removed by an apologetic gesture or a winning smile. Much can, of course, be done by tone of voice, and on this the script-writer can depend, but not all. The writer's meaning, in all its shades and overtones, must be conveyed by sound alone, at least until television entirely replaces mere listening.

Radio audiences are at once the largest and the smallest in the world. Millions of people, of all ages and in all walks of life, listen in to the programmes of the B.B.C. and all tastes must therefore be catered for. At the same time, because the radio brings programmes into the homes of the people, nothing must be broadcast which is likely to offend considerable numbers of listeners. Some topics, especially in relation to religion, morals, certain types of crime, physical disabilities, etc., are best avoided. The B.B.C. is sometimes accused of being prudish, but it must be remembered that while citizens can select for themselves and their children the kind of play or film they see or book they read, the B.B.C.'s monopoly of broadcasting makes it harder to select one's radio listening.

Talks.

The Talk is, perhaps, the easiest kind of broadcasting script to write, and the beginner with some special-

ised knowledge or interest might well make his first attempt at writing for radio by submitting a five- or fifteen-minute talk on some aspect of his own subject. But the script must be a "talk", not an article, nor a speech, nor a lecture. It should be written with one eye on those who will hear it—individuals or small family groups sitting by their firesides or at the supper-table. The tone must be intimate, friendly, conversational. There must be no pompousness, pedantry, smugness or condescension, or else hundreds of listeners, each in his separate home, will switch off.

Writers of radio talks are usually invited to do their own broadcasting (for which, incidentally, they are paid extra), so that you can be sure your script will be read as you wish it to be. Payments vary—the Copyright Department of the B.B.C. reserve the right to offer what they consider the material is worth—but the usual rate is about a guinea a minute of broadcasting time. As a rule the B.B.C. is not interested in buying copyright, contenting itself with paying for one or more "performing rights". This leaves the author free to use broadcast material subsequently for any other market he pleases.

In planning scripts for Talks it should be remembered that they are required not only as separate items (e.g. topical talks after the news) but also as items in various magazine programmes. One of the best known of these, "Woman's Hour", buys a large proportion of its material from freelance writers, many of them with little or no previous experience of writing for radio. The Regions, too, produce magazine programmes where talks on topics of local interest are welcome. It is always possible, too, to have a talk which has been accepted for a national programme

recorded at a regional studio to save the contributor the journey to London.

Features.

A feature programme is something between an extended talk and a play. Instead of describing the work of a particular industry or the sort of lives a group of people lead, or the life story of some famous national figure, the author allows people and events to speak for themselves. The method, in other words, is that of the drama but there is no plot in the usual sense, although there must be an internal unity and sense of continuity to hold the programme together.

Since the aim is to inform as well as to entertain, there must be a solid basis of fact in a feature programme. The author must know his subject and be prepared as a rule to do a good deal of careful research to ensure accuracy and up-to-dateness in every detail, for he can be sure that those who have expert knowledge will listen to his programme and be quick to point out any slip he may make. But the entertainment element must not be forgotten. The picture the author wishes to convey must be brought to life. The people taking part must be real people, speaking as they would in reality and with an outlook on life which rings true. Events, and inanimate objects such as machines should be heard whenever possible, as well as described. As nearly as the limitations of the medium will permit, the listener must be given the illusion of having personally witnessed and experienced that which the author is setting before him.

The device of the narrator, linking the "live" parts of the programme together, should be reduced to a minimum—he is at best a necessary evil—and if

possible he should be worked into the actual programme rather than being an outside commentator. The further the feature programme moves away from the talk and towards the drama the more securely the interest of the listener will be held.

The subjects from which feature programmes can be made are legion. Dramatised biographies are always popular. Outstanding and comparatively self-contained historical events, especially those with a strong regional connection, are also acceptable. Indeed, the Regions are the best market for feature programmes generally, for local interest and patriotism is aroused by the re-creation of the district's historic past or the depicting of aspects in its present-day life.

Successful feature programmes have been based on particular industries, on the daily lives of sections of the community, on many of our national and local institutions, on the life of the countryside. The field is boundless. Listeners are always interested to hear how other folk live and work and play—so long as the picture is presented to them in a realistic and lively fashion.

Short Stories.

The demand for short stories for broadcasting is limited, except in the children's hour programmes which are dealt with in a later paragraph. There is no rigid rule about length, but about 2,000 to 2,500 words with a "running time" of about a quarter of an hour is the average. A careful eye, as always with radio scripts, should be kept on that smoothness of style which makes for easy reading. The plot and the characterisation should be clear-cut and easily

grasped by listeners whose powers of assimilation are not very rapid. The refinements of characterisation and the convolutions of plot possible in the magazine short story would not "get across" on the radio. It is better to have one really good, original idea and work it up convincingly with a strong climax at the end. The story told in the first person by one of the characters or by the author himself (for example, those by Algernon Blackwood) are particularly suitable for this medium. The appeal, too, must be as wide as possible, since the listening-public of the B.B.C. is not selective as is the reading public of one magazine. Stories with a local setting or interest are often acceptable in the Regional offices. The demands of the Third programme for a more literary and sophisticated type of story should be kept in mind.

Drama.

It is in the broadcast play that a writer's sense of radio and flair for handling this medium is most severely tested. The demand is very considerable, and there is always a ready welcome for a script which shows that the writer has a sound grasp of the technique. Indeed, members of the B.B.C.'s Drama Department set aside time for the purpose of assisting writers whose work shows signs of promise.

The radio drama must get off to a firm start. Unless the interest is caught from the first, all but confirmed play-listeners will switch off, for a play cannot be treated as background listening; to have it on means committing oneself—and one's family—to a period of solid listening.

Since dialogue is everything in the radio play, this

dialogue must be superlatively good. All that was said on the short story about realistic and convincing speech applies in increased measure to the radio. Insincerity, artificiality, a slight literary flavour may pass muster in a story to be read but will cry its falsity aloud over the air. In inventing dialogue, the author should ask himself after each speech "Who among the characters is most likely to be the first to react to this, what would his or her reaction be and how would he or she express it?" Dialogue, that is, as well as individual speeches, must be "in character".

The plot should be unfolded clearly and simply. It is hard enough to explain to the listener, by means of dialogue alone, where everyone is and what they are doing without introducing unnecessary complications. The number of characters should be limited and these should be sharply individualised so that the listener will not confuse one with another. There should never be more than three or four main characters in any one scene or the hearer will lose track of them and his interest will flag.

Because it is difficult to convey action by means of dialogue, the temptation in writing radio plays is to make the characters mere talking machines. This is a mistake. Things must be kept moving, with plenty of activity, change of scene, the introduction of new and interesting characters, etc. In writing his script, however, the beginner should be careful not to overdo the sound effects. There was a time when the more sound effects that could be worked in the more convincing the result was considered to be; no mention could be made of the sea without an accompanying squeal of the B.B.C.-gulls. That day has gone, and

economy in sound effects is now the rule. Another surprisingly common fault is the inclusion in radio scripts of a multitude of stage directions, many of which indicate actions which would be inaudible to the listener (e.g. "Inspector Brown walks over and taps his man smartly on the shoulder"). Getting characters on and off the stage is another problem. The beginner is advised to listen to the various devices used by skilled exponents. Indeed, intelligent, purposeful listening followed by diligent attempts to put into practice what has been learnt is the best method of making progress in this difficult art.

Variety.

In listening to individual radio turns and composite variety programmes, we might perhaps forget, if we were not constantly and rather wearisomely reminded by the comedians themselves, that everything is scripted in advance. The writing of material for comedians is not, as a rule, a task for the beginner. It requires a very intimate knowledge of the artiste's talents and style which is difficult to acquire by mere listening without personal acquaintance. On the other hand, since many—so many—radio "comics" have a marked similarity of style the freelance who feels he has a talent for writing humorous patter might well attempt to break into this very profitable branch of radio work by submitting short scripts for ten-minute "turns" either to the Director of Variety or to an appropriate artiste.

The plum in Variety, and indeed in the whole radio business, is the establishment of a successful series which catches the fancy of the listening public and runs perhaps for years. Originality is the essential

136 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

here. Variations on existing programmes can be thought out from inside ; what is always in demand is a really new idea. As with radio drama, an intimate knowledge of radio technique, although valuable, is not essential ; there are staff men ready to supply this if they discover someone with a first-class central idea for a series and plenty of bright suggestions for working it out and keeping it going. It is worth noting that the best ideas are not elaborate—indeed they are often so obvious that one wonders no one has thought of them before. And they must have that universality of appeal which will satisfy a wide variety of listeners and stand up to repetition week after week. That there is plenty of room for new blood in this branch of writing for radio is proved by the unevenness of the material at present being used.

Children's Hour.

Much of what is said in Chapter 13 on the general principles to be borne in mind in writing for children applies equally to scripts designed for Children's Hour, except that the age-range to which a radio programme is directed is usually wider than that of a magazine, while every attempt must be made to appeal to boys and girls at the same time.

Stories, talks on topics of interest to older children, plays and dialogue stories are all in demand. Stories should be short of a thousand words for younger children and from 1,500 to 2,000 words for older ones. Plays should run for about 45 minutes, but those intended for younger listeners should not exceed half an hour.

A great deal of thought and research has gone into

the framing of the B.B.C.'s Children's Hour policy, and it is essential that anyone wishing to write acceptable scripts should gain a clear idea of what this policy is by studying it in practice in programmes actually being broadcast. The following summing-up of this policy, quoted from an article on the B.B.C. Children's Hour by its late Head, Derek McCulloch,* may be of assistance:—

The established policy is that nothing but the best is good enough for children, who are the citizens of the future; we try to give them entertainment only of the best quality. We do not aim primarily at educating our listeners . . . but we have to remember that most of our audience have had a day in school, and many have homework in prospect. We want to stimulate their imagination, direct their reading, encourage their various interests, widen their outlook, and inculcate the Christian principles of love of God and their neighbour.

Opportunities in the Regions.

The B.B.C. maintains six Regional programmes—Midland, North, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, West—in addition to those broadcast from London; the Regional offices plan and buy their own material. Any script which has a local interest should be submitted in the first instance to the appropriate Region. Beginners will often find, that although standards in the Regions are high there is rather less competition and that programme directors have a natural desire to encourage promising local talent. The Regional offices are always ready to help those who, while showing ability as writers, have not yet completely mastered radio technique.

The Third Programme.

Writing for the Third Programme is very much a matter for the expert. However wide the range of topics which finds a place in this programme, the general rule applies that no one who was not something of a recognised authority on his subject would have much chance of acceptance.

The freelance writer, however, who has specialised and has developed ideas of his own should consider this means of expression as an alternative to the learned journals and literary reviews. He must be prepared, however, to find that a large proportion of his hearers will consist of fellow-experts quick to note and expose errors and shortcomings. In spite of its neglect in many Third Programme broadcasts, skilled radio technique is as important here as elsewhere.

Submitting Scripts.

Scripts submitted to the B.B.C. should be type-written and should conform to the rules laid down on page 164. In the case of plays and feature programmes a synopsis together with a specimen passage of dialogue should be submitted in the first instance. The chief B.B.C. Departments are Drama, Variety, Features, Talks, News, Outside Broadcasts and Children's Hour. Material or enquiries should be sent to the Director of the appropriate Department, either in London or in the Regions. B.B.C. addresses will be found in the usual reference books.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WRITING FOR CHILDREN

Opportunities for the Freelance.

HERE is a form of literary activity which is almost entirely in the hands of freelance writers. It is true that publishing houses (such as the Amalgamated Press and D. C. Thomson & Co. of Dundee) maintain full-time staffs to edit and write for their juvenile periodicals and annuals, but they also use a very large proportion of work sent in by outside contributors.

This, too, is a field in which the beginner, given certain basic qualifications and the ability to work intelligently, has every chance of success. Indeed, writing for children is the door through which many writers have entered upon a much wider literary career. Howard Spring is by no means the only successful writer to make a beginning by inventing stories for his own youngsters and then issuing them in book form for the enjoyment of other children.

There is plenty of room here for newcomers. The relaxing of paper restrictions has brought about the revival and the first appearance of a host of children's weekly and monthly magazines—*Willing's Press Guide* lists 96 periodicals and 36 annuals for children, and others are constantly appearing, while most daily and weekly newspapers are again featuring a children's corner in which outside contributors can often find a market for first-rate material. Every Christmas season sees the issue of dozens of annuals, catering for all age-groups. Add to this the demands of the

Educational Press for well-written stories for school Readers, and of the B.B.C. for material for their various children's programmes, and it will be appreciated that no one who has anything worth-while to offer in this field need go short of a market. And we have said nothing so far of full-length books for children for which there is a steady and insatiable demand.

Rates of Payment.

The objection that many freelance writers feel to giving much of their time to writing for children, if they have talents in any other direction, is that the rates of payment, generally speaking, are low. There are doubtless reasons for this—too many writers in the field prepared to accept low rates, the fact that children cannot easily make their preference for one writer heard and so raise that writer's market value, and so on—but the fact remains that it would be very difficult for any but the few "big names" or the hardest of workers to make a living at this type of writing alone. The incomes earned by Enid Blyton and W. E. Johns, for example, must not be taken as typical of the monetary rewards in this field.

It is still the custom among most publishers to buy all rights in children's books for a lump sum which is frequently as low as £50 for a 50,000 word novel, while articles and stories for children's periodicals are often paid for at proportionate rates or even lower. There are exceptions—notably, for example, periodicals of the standing of the *Boy's Own Paper*—where rates compare favourably with those obtainable in other forms of journalism; and the effective expression, too, of children's preferences through public

library sales is making it worth the while of publishers to pay higher rates to established children's writers. But there is much leeway still to be made up. It is still necessary, if this type of writing is to be made to pay, for most children's authors to manipulate their material skilfully, selling first British serial rights only to the original buyer and then exploiting further rights elsewhere. Thus a story serialised in a magazine might, after adaptation, be later issued in book form; a story appearing in a Christmas annual might later be offered to an educational publisher or to the B.B.C., and so on. (But see Chapter 16.)

The Technique of Writing for Children.

Writing for children involves not one technique but several, varying with the age-group for which a particular piece of writing is intended. But there are a number of well-defined general principles which the beginner in this type of work must bear in mind.

The man or woman who would write acceptably for children must understand and like children. This is a fundamental condition for success. Some academic knowledge of child psychology and a careful study of the work of successful children's authors can be most helpful, but in the end it is the person who has lived and worked with children, studying and coming to understand them at first hand—their outlook on life, their peculiar standards of right and wrong, their sense of humour, the extent and the limitations of their imaginative powers—whose work will most readily win the children's interest and approval.

Most of the pitfalls against which would-be writers for children are usually warned will be obvious enough

to anyone who has thus learnt to understand the child's mind from inside. For instance, no one who really knows children would dream of "writing down" to them with the condescending air of the adult unbending for the nonce to the ignorant and the immature. To reach children one must talk to them directly, at their own level, and as though what was being said was of the utmost seriousness and importance.

Again, those who understand children will know that they have no interest in abstract ideas and little interest in character-drawing or background-painting for their own sake. Action is what they crave for; something must happen, and keep on happening. It is nice to know about the people taking part in the action and where it all took place, but these are subsidiary matters to the child, and much better taken in through illustrations than through written description anyway. Abstract ideas such as patriotism, friendship, loyalty can be inherent in the story and its outcome (and indeed should be) but they must never find direct expression or the young reader will become bored or suspicious.

Another point worth remembering in writing for children is that they are not so suggestible as adult readers. They judge each book or story on its merits for themselves, regardless of the reputation of the writer. It is true that they have their favourites, to whose work they are always ready to give priority, but that favour only continues as long as the writer concerned continues to deliver the goods. Let him or her put out one or two second-rate pieces of work and the largest of reputation-bubbles would vanish in a very short time. This is partly, of course, because a

generation of child-readers is so much shorter than that of adults.

The language and style to be used in writing for children will, of course, vary largely with the age-group, but in general care should be taken to see that the vocabulary used is within the comprehension of the children concerned. Short words are better than long, concrete than abstract, colloquial than literary. In selecting colloquial expressions, the conscientious writer would do well to use the language actually spoken by reasonably well brought up children rather than the vulgarisms of the street and the back yard which are to be found in some of our more disreputable "comics" and "annuals" at the moment. In this matter of language, the writer for children might well assist the schools in their heart-breaking task of trying to improve standards instead of depraving them still further. The most charitable view one can take of much that is issued for children by some periodicals today is that those who write and those who edit are folk who themselves know no better.

The Nursery Stage.

Whether the writer intends to specialise on one age-group or cover the whole field of children's work, he or she will find it necessary to study carefully the needs and demands of each age-group separately. At the nursery stage the call is for short, simple stories told vividly in easy words and making little demand on the extended attention of the listener. The style must flow easily, for at this age (three to five years) the stories will have to be read aloud to the child. The most suitable length is from 400 to 600 words. Popular subjects include animal stories (on the lines

of those by Beatrix Potter and Alison Uttley); tales of mischievous gnomes and fairies, real-life child stories so long as the action is within the experience of children of this age, tales about pets, and toys which come to life. The tone should be cheerful and happy, although a mild cautionary "which all goes to show," note can sometimes be introduced. The element of repetition—the recurrence of a phrase or saying throughout the story—is much appreciated by children of this age.

The Junior Stage.

Between the ages of six and ten children have learnt to read for themselves and their horizon has widened beyond the bounds of home and a limited imagination. They are ready for more varied subject-matter in their stories. Adventure stories (so long as they are not too highly-coloured or harrowing) appeal, as do realistic tales of school and home life. Humour is now appreciated, although it must be an active and by adult standards rather crude type of humour. The imaginative story still has its attraction, especially for girls, but the approach is more mature and a humorous twist will often make the story more acceptable. The length of short stories can now be extended to between 1,000 and 1,500 words. Children at this age begin to enjoy informative articles as well as stories, articles dealing with hobbies, nature, elementary science, needlecraft, "how to make and do" and so forth.

The School-boy Stage.

From the age of ten on the interests and demands of boys and girls begin to diverge, although there remains

some common ground between them. The primary demand of boys of this age is for adventure stories—highly coloured, fast-moving, breath-taking adventure. The central characters must be readily intelligible and clear-cut—good or bad. They exist—with the possible exception of such popular heroes as “Biggles”—solely for the sake of the story. War-time adventures, especially in the air, retain their popularity as do tales involving new scientific inventions and discoveries, real or imaginary. School stories, with plenty of broadly humorous and exciting incident and perhaps a dash of thrill or mystery, command a ready market. The *Boy's Own Paper* has recently experimented very successfully with a type of story based on the daily lives of people such as farmers, firemen, professional footballers, Australian sheep-farmers, and so on. The average length for short stories for boys of this age is from 3,000 to 5,000 words.

There is one point which all who write for boys must keep in mind, however fantastic or imaginative their main theme may be. Boys are literal minded with a great respect for, and knowledge of, fact—exact and detailed fact. Let the unwary writer slip up on some detail of aeroplane construction, sports records, mode of play, historical or scientific accuracy, and he will be met by a howl of derisive protest from his readers. You may send your hero off on never so fantastic an errand with impunity, but let him travel in the wrong kind of plane, or in an express that does not stop at that particular station, or in a liner which was broken up last year and in the language of your critics, you will have “had it”. It is not what you think important but what your reader thinks important that matters.

The Schoolgirl Stage.

With girls between the ages of ten and fifteen there can be no doubt that the preference is overwhelmingly in favour of school stories. At one time the school was almost invariably a boarding-school, either in this country or abroad, but of late years stories about day schools have found an increasing market. The ingredients are very much the same as for boys' stories, except that the emphasis is oftener on such moral problems as loyalty, honesty, fair dealing and rather less on boisterous practical humour, although the latter has its place.

Stories about groups of girls in settings other than those of school, e.g. camping with the guides or other youth organisations, on holiday at youth hostels, on a house-boat on the river, etc., are very popular, and there is an increasing demand for stories in which boys as well as girls take part. Indeed, many writers contrive to win both boy and girl readers for adventure stories of this type.

Girls show a fondness, too, for historical stories—especially where there are young people, including at least one girl, taking part—but the emphasis must still be on action and adventure; few girls or boys at this age are ready to be interested in historical settings for their own sake. Stories for girls in the later years of this stage often include some lightly sketched love interest. (This is specially true of historical stories, and indeed, even boys will accept this element as introduced in such tales as Stevenson's *Black Arrow* or Quiller-Couch's *Splendid Spur*.)

In general it may be said that girls are rather more serious minded than boys. They mature more quickly

and when boys are still in the literal, factual, objective stage, girls of the same age have begun to take some interest in the larger issues that will concern them as adults. And, although schoolgirls have no wish to take their leisure-time reading too seriously, they appreciate an approach in which the writer seems to address them as they imagine one grown-up would address another.

Juvenile Markets.

In writing for juveniles it is just as imperative to study the particular market aimed at as with any other form of freelance writing. Each periodical has its own policy and aims at a particular group of readers—the distinction may be one of class and home background as well as of age. Nor is the average children's paper or magazine produced at random, using each week or month any generally suitable material that may come in. Most editors follow a distinct policy or conduct experiments or try out new ideas often extending over many issues and material which fits into their schemes has far more chance of acceptance. A surprising amount of work these days is commissioned—especially by the better-class periodicals—or carried out as a result of ideas discussed between the editor and the contributor. It is imperative, therefore, for the children's writer to keep in constant touch with the policies of the magazines for which he wishes to write, and before working out any idea which is at all out of the ordinary a preliminary letter of enquiry should be the rule. And yet, for the writer who has the ability and will study and conform to the trends he observes, the market is undoubtedly there in the juvenile periodicals and there is room for all.

In submitting contributions to the many annuals which appear round about Christmas each year, the time factor should be kept in mind. Practice varies, but most houses publishing annuals gather the material between July and Christmas for the following year, although some are open to receive contributions late into the spring. Where several annuals each appealing to a different age-group are issued by the same house, there is no need to specify for which a contribution is intended. Otherwise a publisher should be chosen whose annual would be suitable for any particular contribution. Stories, articles, drawings, verses, puzzles, jokes, riddles are all acceptable. The writer who wishes to make his pen yield the maximum return will be wise to state clearly in the covering letter exactly what rights he is offering.

The B.B.C. is a particularly worth-while market which all children's writers would do well to study and cultivate. To begin with, rates of payment are usually higher than those to be obtained elsewhere. Nor are the B.B.C. too particular about the previous or future history of contributions they consider suitable for broadcasting. That a story appeared two years ago in a Christmas annual or is used again in a couple of months' time in a weekly "comic" matters little to them—although it is always as well to state exactly what has already been done with material submitted. The freelance writer will find, too, that dealing with the B.B.C. is a pleasure; the promptness and courtesy shown both in the Regions and in London are exemplary. It must, however, be remembered, as we saw in Chapter 12, that writing for radio is a specialised technique, which can only be learned by

much intelligent and purposeful listening to actual programmes.

Those who wish to write book-length stories for children may find it a fascinating spare-time hobby, but for all but the few it is a very arduous way of making a livelihood. Conditions are improving slowly, but the outright purchase of copyright often for a shockingly meagre sum, in view of the post-war cost of living, is still very common. The beginner may be glad to place his first MS. at any price—and he is perhaps wise—but as soon as he has a book or two to his credit he should make every endeavour to get on to a royalty basis. So long as quite competent amateur writers are prepared to sell the fruits of a pleasant hobby in return for mere pin-money, conditions for the serious professional can never improve.

In seeking to place book MSS. it should be remembered that publishers often run a series (or perhaps several), each containing books of the same length, selling at the same price and appealing to the same type of reader. If a MS. is to be acceptable to such a publisher it must fit into one of these series. Other publishers view each book on its merits irrespective of those they already have on their list. Here again, market study will save much disappointment and waste of time.

The Juvenile Writer's Responsibility.

A word may, perhaps, be added on the responsibility of those who write for children. A plea has been put forward above that the labourer in this, as in other literary fields, is worthy of his just hire. But writing for children should be, and indeed is for most of those engaged in it, something more than mere

150 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

money-making. To have a share in shaping and directing the minds of the children of today who will be the citizens of tomorrow is no light trust—the more so because what they read for fun in their leisure hours is often much more powerful in its effects on children's minds than what is taught in school and church.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE PICTURE MAKES THE STORY.

The Value of Pictures

"FOR every reader who sits down to read the text, a hundred more are lured into doing so by the impact of the pictures." So wrote Ken Hulton of *Picture Post*, and he should know, for the phenomenal success of his journal has been built upon the application of this principle. Not only do skilfully selected pictures arrest the attention of those who scan the pages of a magazine, looking for something to interest them, but they also make a strong appeal to the many who take in ideas through the eye rather than directly into the mind from the printed word.

Illustrations give pleasure, too, quite apart from helping to make the accompanying letterpress intelligible or interesting. It is not children only who enjoy "just looking at the pictures". The imagination is stimulated without being tied down, so that the response of one reader will be quite different from that of another. And even when pictures and letterpress are taken together, the illustrations will often, as their name implies, throw light upon the text; so that what would have needed pages of description becomes at once apparent.

From the point of view of the freelance, the submission of pictures with articles and other contributions has another advantage. It is a well-known practice, since there is no copyright in facts, for journalists to collect information from various sources,

as we have seen in previous chapters, and write up this with a topical or local twist into something new. Editors are reluctant, however, to accept articles which call up too obviously the musty atmosphere of the reference library; to vary the metaphor, an unimaginative re-hash is no more acceptable on the editorial table than on the dinner table. One of the most effective ways of bringing new life and an up-to-date interest into often-used material is to include new, exciting, "live" pictures. Thus do seasonal articles and those based on traditional festivals and ancient customs retain their perpetual youth!

Original pictures will often serve the useful purpose, too, of lending an air of authenticity to an article; for they convey the impression that a writer who is thus able to get actual photographs of his own of what he is describing has a close first-hand acquaintance with the subject.

We may, therefore, add to the newspaperman's saying "the picture makes the story" a further aphorism for the freelance, "the pictures often sell the article". In this chapter we discuss some of the problems which face the freelance in obtaining and submitting pictures.

What Kind of Pictures?

The selection of pictures will largely depend, of course, on the nature of the contribution and the type of periodical for which it is intended. But it is possible to lay down a few general rules which the freelance may find helpful.

To be interesting, and therefore acceptable to editors, pictures must be *alive*, there must be action

in them, something must be happening. This is true even of such landscape studies as "High Summer in the Cotswolds", and the like. There must be hay-makers at work, children playing in the fields, or a picnic party under the shadow of a hedge. Pictures must have a wide general appeal rather than a restricted personal interest. Readers will not be interested in your holiday snaps, however vivid the memories they evoke for you; nor in studies of your fiancé(e) or your children, unless you have captured something which will call forth a response from those who care nothing for the originals.

A picture should have a new idea behind it. Either the subject must be different, or the treatment must be new. Pictures taken from unusual angles, people doing unaccustomed or unexpected things, familiar scenes photographed under exceptional conditions, all help to give that new slant or angle which arrests the attention. The hackneyed and the commonplace must be avoided. Even newspapers depicting their weekly bathing belle strive to give to her display of charms some variety of action or setting.

Where the nature of the article calls for pictures of inanimate objects, a human figure should be added to give life and interest. But care must be taken to link this person reasonably with the object or process concerned. To depict a pretty girl in a picture hat standing beside a new design of reaper and binder would be pointless; to dress her up as an attractive land-girl showing a businesslike interest in the machine would add to the drawing-power of your illustration. Which raises another point: individuals or groups should never be "posed" in a picture for the Press. "Just get on with whatever you are doing and take

no notice of me," says the experienced Press photographer, and then waits to catch his subjects absorbed and off their guard. It is thus that the best pictures are obtained.

But the picture which will always have the strongest appeal for most of us is the picture that tells a story. Currents of art criticism may have set against them nowadays, but the paintings which stay most vividly in the memories of most of us are such old favourites as "When Did You Last See Your Father?", "The Order of Reprieve", and Hogarth's "Rake's Progress" series—pictures in other words, which tell a story. "The kind of pictures I like best," wrote A. W. Hardy (again of *Picture Post*),* "are pictures which give you some idea of how people live." Those are the pictures over which readers linger as they turn the pages; those are the pictures which are reproduced over and over again—and sometimes earn large sums of money for the photographer!

To find and secure pictures of this kind calls for a combination of both technical and artistic skill. Unless he has the eye of the artist, the ability to "see" a picture, to select from a whole series of scenes, happenings and people the one composition which will make a memorable picture, the beginner will never make a first-class photographer. Occasionally the blundering amateur is lucky—like the boy fisherman with the bent pin—but he will not be able to repeat and maintain his success. Technical ability of a high order, too, is required if even the most inspired of artistic picture-finders is to capture his inspiration in terms of a sharp, well-balanced,

adequately lighted negative. And this technical skill comes only with time and patience.

Because the obtaining of acceptable pictures is becoming increasingly work for the expert, many freelance journalists may ask whether it is worth their while to take their own pictures at all or whether they would not do better to obtain suitable illustrations for their articles from other sources.

Both methods have advantages. Clearly the writer who takes his own pictures can go for exactly what he wants, with the actual article in mind while the picture is being taken. Moreover, since most periodicals pay extra for illustrations, while pictures obtained from other sources must usually be paid for, it will be to his financial advantage to take his own. On the other hand, good photographic equipment and materials are expensive, the obtaining of first-class pictures takes time, and he has no guarantee that the picture he finally gets will be just what he wants. He may find it more profitable, therefore, to stay at his desk and leave picture-taking to the expert. Some freelance writers have solved the problem by a form of collaboration; they write the articles while someone else gets the pictures and the spoils are divided in an agreed proportion. It all very much depends on whether the individual writer has the technical skill, the artistic flair or the personal interest to be his own photographer. One thing, however, is certain, that unless the job is done exceptionally well it is best left to the expert.

Obtaining One's Own Pictures.

There is no need for the freelance to purchase a very expensive camera or a great deal of elaborate equip-

ment. Good results can be obtained without all the paraphernalia with which the studio photographer impresses his clients. But only the very best of materials—films or plates—must be used if the results are to stand up to enlargement and processing. Nor is there any need for the freelance to develop, print and enlarge his own pictures. If he can turn in a good negative the ordinary Developing and Printing Chemist can generally do the rest, or if something special is required, can put him on to the expert who will handle the job. Where prints are wanted in a hurry, there is seldom any difficulty, if an explanation is given, in getting work done in a matter of hours.

Plates or film-packs are better for Press and magazine work than roll films, since it is possible to develop an individual picture at once if required, without having to use up hastily or perhaps waste a number of other negatives. Large prints rather than small should be the rule since they not only create a more favourable impression on the editor, but also give more room for the re-toucher to work in. Half-plate size ($6\frac{1}{2}$ in. \times $3\frac{3}{4}$ in.) is usually satisfactory, though pictures sent to the agencies or the newspapers should be larger; 10 in. \times 8 in., for example. The black and white glossy bromide print should be used, and the aim should be to get a print which is sharp without being harsh. There should be a wide range of intervening shades between the black and white.

Pictures from Other Sources.

For the freelance writer who cannot or does not wish to be his own photographer, there are many sources from which pictures can be obtained. There are, first, the commercial firms of photographers and

others who supply pictures and photographs for illustrations. The *Writers' and Artists' Year Book* lists over a hundred of these in Britain, with specialities ranging from ballet to butterflies, speedway racing to seaweed. Indeed, most of these picture agencies have their own special lines and it is usually possible for the freelance in search of a particular kind of picture to find a firm to whom he can look for expert advice and assistance.

Those in search of illustrations for historical articles, articles dealing with customs and traditions of bygone days, or biographical articles, should bear in mind that most of the public museums and art galleries supply prints, or even blocks, of items in their collections, and often at very much cheaper rates than those charged by the commercial photographic agencies. Full details of these and other facilities will be found in *The Museums, Libraries and Art Galleries Year Book*. Indeed, the freelance writer will do well to make himself thoroughly acquainted with our larger museums and galleries, for not only can they often help him with pictorial illustrations, but their contents will provide him with ideas for articles or with instances and examples to illustrate ideas he already has in mind.

It is, however, often possible to obtain pictures without incurring any expense at all. Many firms, organisations, societies and government departments are eager to seize upon the publicity which the publication of illustrations advertising their products or concerns may bring, and will gladly supply pictures free of charge. Writers for the technical and trade press usually have no difficulty in obtaining illustrations of the latest developments from firms manu-

facturing the goods concerned.) Views and holiday photographs are readily supplied by many travel and tourist agencies, by the publicity departments of holiday resorts, and even by some foreign governments. The film studios, to whom publicity is the very breath of life, are always ready to supply "stills" (and very beautiful prints they are, too) which can be used effectively as illustrations. All that is required where pictures are obtained free of charge in this way is an acknowledgment of their source. That much the writer owes, although there is usually no legal obligation.

When and How to Submit Pictures.

The "when" first. It is a general rule that a magazine or journal accustomed to include pictures will be more likely to accept an illustrated than an unillustrated article. They can always reject the pictures if they wish, or substitute others of their own, but where no help is given with the illustrations by the author, the whole burden is thrown on the editor and his staff. On the other hand, any pictures submitted must be first-rate of their kind and appropriate to the article. To work on the assumption that any pictures are better than none will destroy the editor's confidence in the author's judgment. It is, of course, futile to submit pictures to a periodical which is not illustrated. As with articles, so with pictures; the secret of successful placing lies in market study.

When sending illustrations with an article, it is a good plan to include more than you think necessary, so that the editor may have the opportunity of making a choice. Some prints should be vertical, some horizontal to assist the lay-out designer to secure variety.

The print, or the negative before printing, can often be trimmed to advantage in order to secure the best picture for the writer's purpose. This requires nice judgment and a keen eye for effect and should be done with the greatest caution. But the effect of skilful trimming is to eliminate the irrelevant and bring out the essential features—the attention of the reader is concentrated instead of distracted.

Captions.

Captions for pictures are best typed on a slip of paper which is then stuck on the back of the print. They can be attached to project below the picture as when printed, but this is not very satisfactory as they are then easily crumpled or torn.

Caption-writing is an art in itself, to which the freelance will be wise to give careful attention. The method used by the Picture Agencies is to print a title in capitals, followed by a description bringing out the point or application of the picture. To this is added a formal note of its contents beginning "Photograph shows . . ." A clever, humorous or striking caption can often add much to the value of a picture. The reader is advised to study carefully the style of caption writing in use in the particular market at which he is aiming at the moment, and to this he will be wise to conform.

Packing.

We shall say more about how to submit MSS. in Chapter 15, but a point or two about transmitting pictures may be noted here. Prints should never, of course, be folded. They should be posted flat, with a cardboard backing-sheet to prevent crumpling in

the post. The envelope enclosed for their return should be large enough for them to be sent back flat, and since editors do not always bother to transfer the backing-sheet, many writers place this *inside* the return envelope, to ensure that the prints shall be protected on both journeys.

Freelance Press Photography as a Career.

So great is the demand today for good pictures, good because of their technical excellence and/or because of the ideas behind them, that many skilled picture journalists prefer to work up their own freelancing connection rather than take a newspaper or magazine staff appointment. And there is still plenty of room left over for the part-timer who combines Press photography with freelance writing or some other occupation.

As a rule the freelance photographer will not find his most profitable field in attempting to compete with the staff men in obtaining news-pictures of day-to-day "diary" events or of such occurrences as fires, accidents, wrecks, etc.: although even here an alert freelance occasionally gets the "scoop" picture. He will do better to cultivate the newspaper and magazine market for "human angle" pictures, pictures with ideas, humorous snaps, seasonal or character studies, and the like. Magazine editors will often accept a series of pictures, if the subject-matter is interesting enough, and commission someone else to write the article to go with them.

The time factor is an important one in submitting pictures. News-pictures rapidly decrease in value with the passage of time, so that the freelance who has secured what he believes is a "scoop" picture

should get the plate away direct to an agency with the minimum of delay. Pictures for the weekly magazines should be in the office at least a fortnight before the date of publication, and those for the monthlies three months before publication date. It is a good plan to take seasonal photographs one year and store them ready for use in the following year.

The indexing and storing of negatives and prints calls for the same systematic method as any other part of freelancing work. Orderly arrangement and ready accessibility must be the rule, for pictures cannot always be used as soon as taken, and can often be made to earn money two or three times over. Some such cross-reference system as that suggested in Chapter 5 for a Press-cuttings file, should be adopted as soon as the freelance photographer has more pictures than he can conveniently handle in a simple alphabetical file.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PREPARING AND SUBMITTING MSS.

COMPETITION in freelance markets is keen. Apart from the mass of quite unsuitable material that pours into every newspaper and magazine office, enough competently written, usable copy is generally available for the editor to be able to pick and choose. The final choice of the items to be accepted will therefore often depend on some relatively minor factor, so that it behoves the freelance to make sure that his or her contribution is not among those rejected because, although suitable in itself, it lacks some editorial attraction which another possesses. In this chapter suggestions are offered on the preparation and submission of MSS. which may save the beginner some avoidable rejection slips.

Let us suppose that the freelance writer has just completed an article or story designed for a particular market. His or her next task will be a most careful revision of the rough draft before this is sent to the typist or the final copy typed on the writer's own machine. Except in the case of a highly topical article, this revision is best made after the lapse of a day or two, so that the MS. may be approached with a detached and objective eye—the aim being to see ourselves as others will see us, and act accordingly.

During revision, the MS. should not be read with the complacent, self-satisfied air of one who says, "By Jove, this is good. All my own work, too!" The attitude should be rather, "This is probably full

of error, redundancy and amateurish faults, some of which I hope to discover before the editor or sub-editor has a chance to." Some of the faults for which the beginner should be on the look out are these :—

- (a) *Grammatical and spelling errors.* Incorrect grammar and bad spelling are weaknesses in which the freelance writer cannot afford to indulge if his work is to be taken seriously.
- (b) *Faulty or careless punctuation.* Punctuation is partly a matter of rules, and partly of personal taste. The rules must, of course, be known and observed. Beyond that, the guiding principle should be : punctuate sparingly and in order to make your meaning clearer. If sentences are kept short and the writer thinks out his meaning clearly before attempting to write it down, punctuation can be reduced to a minimum. A careful study of current practice will teach more than many rule-books. It should be noted that most publishing houses have their own conventions in this matter.
- (c) *Redundancy.* Every unnecessary word or phrase should be pruned away. Wherever a phrase can replace a clause, or a single word can replace a phrase, the change should be made. All qualifying or emphasising words and phrases ("very" in particular), should be cut out unless they are indispensable to the meaning. The aim should be a clean-cut, stream-lined style in which every word has been carefully chosen to convey the maximum of meaning.

Beginners find this pruning both difficult and distasteful, but it is essential to success; the lack of it is one of the chief reasons why promising work is often rejected.

(d) *Lack of clarity.* You may know what you meant, but will your reader? Any obscurity or ambiguity is fatal in modern journalism. The reader's understanding of the meaning must be immediate and certain. This applies particularly, of course, to informative or instructional articles, but it is equally true of all other forms of writing. Clear expression flows from clear thinking.

(e) *Errors of fact.* The writer will, if he is wise, have already checked all his material before beginning to write, but a final check on facts should always form part of the revision. In the heat of writing, mistakes can creep in—names, dates, figures, place-names, for example, can be wrongly transferred from the writer's notes. If such blunders reach the editor, they may spoil the article's chances of success; if they reach the pages of the magazine, they will probably close that market to the writer for ever.

Preparing MSS. for the Press.

The rough draft is now ready for typing—and typed it must be, for few editorial offices will even consider handwritten copy today. The ideal is to pass over one's typing to a competent typist specialising in this kind of work. Fees are higher than they were, but many writers feel, especially if they are not expert typists themselves, that the time spent

on typing MSS. laboriously with two fingers could be better employed in further writing or research.

If, however, the freelance decides to do his or her own typing, here are some rules to bear in mind :—

- (a) Buy good-quality quarto paper, neither too thick nor too thin. Economy in paper is a mistake. Good paper will stand up better to comings and goings in the post!
- (b) Always use double spacing, leaving a good margin all round, particularly at the top and left-hand side. Never type on both sides of the paper. Don't cram copy.
- (c) Number the pages in the top right-hand corner.
- (d) Keep your machine in good order. Clean the type face frequently and renew the ribbon regularly. A black ribbon is best.
- (e) Study a good typewriting manual, where you will find many valuable hints on the various methods and devices for setting out literary work.*

When the typescript is complete, it should be checked for typing errors. Even at this stage other errors and opportunities for "boiling down" may be noticed, and there is no reason why such corrections should not be made on the final copy, so long as they are not so numerous as to make the MS. look untidy. Any page over-full of corrections should be re-typed.

On the title page the following information should appear :—

- (a) The title, followed by the writer's name or pen-name as he wishes it to appear if the MS. is accepted.

* *Teach Yourself Typewriting* (E.U.P. 4s. 6d.).

- (b) The writer's name and address for correspondence purposes.
- (c) The approximate number of words (to the nearest fifty). A rough estimate is obtained by reckoning two hundred and fifty words to a quarto page in double spacing.
- (d) An established writer will often add the rights offered (e.g. first British serial rights) and even the payment per thousand words expected, but the beginner need not worry about this—his main object is usually to get his work accepted.

The name and address of the sender should be repeated on the last page, in case the title-sheet should be torn off or go astray. A carbon copy should be kept of every MS. sent out, in case of accident and for reference purposes.

The best method of binding pages of a MS. together is to use tagged cord. Pins which scratch the unwary or paper clips which fly off when the pages are turned back should be avoided. With a long MS. such as a novel the chapters should be fastened together separately so that the publisher's reader is not compelled to handle the whole MS. all the time.

When a MS. has been submitted and returned several times, it may begin to look tired and jaded. The re-typing of the title-page and perhaps one or two more pages will often be sufficient to give it a renewed freshness. No editor is favourably impressed by a contribution which has obviously been rejected by a number of his fellows.

Submitting MSS. to Editors.

When you are satisfied that your MS. is as good as

you can make it, both in content and appearance, you are ready to send it off to an editor. MSS. should be folded as little as possible. Long MSS. should be carefully packed, first in corrugated and then in stout brown paper, and sent by registered post. Short articles and stories may be folded once and sent in an envelope of the appropriate size. It is scarcely worth registering these. An addressed and adequately stamped envelope should always be enclosed with any contribution. No editorial office can be expected to return rejected MSS. unless this is done. Nor can editors be held responsible for the safety of MSS. submitted to them, although all reasonable care is taken. (Hence the need for keeping copies.) With long MSS. or those containing valuable pictures or drawings, it is a good plan to enclose an acknowledgment reply card addressed to the sender stating that the MSS. have arrived safely. This can then be initialled by the editor or publisher and posted.

Whether a covering letter is enclosed depends on the circumstances. If the writer has special qualifications or experience for writing on the subject it is as well to say so. Any suggestions the writer has to offer about illustrations might also be included in a covering letter. Some writers always enclose a brief covering letter, as a matter of courtesy stating that they are enclosing a story/article entitled — which the editor may care to use in (the name of the journal or magazine). It is very much a matter of taste. But a covering letter must always be brief and should never contain personal details about the writer. Such details do not influence editors' decisions in the least. For literary correspondence it is worth while

to use good-quality note-paper, and many writers add the words "From So-and-So" to the printed address at the top.

In addressing the envelope it should be remembered that some publishing houses which issue a number of journals and magazines have a pooling system by which suitable MSS. not required by one editor are passed round to others in the same group. Contributions addressed to the Central Editorial Service of the Amalgamated Press will be treated in this way, as will those sent to D. C. Thomson & Co. Ltd., Dundee, Arthur Pearson, Ltd., George Newnes, Ltd., and a number of others. (See p. 189.) A request for this to be done should be included in a covering letter.

It is unwise to worry editors too soon for a decision on a MS. submitted to them, but if no reply has been received after six or eight weeks, a polite letter may be sent stating that a contribution entitled So-and-So was dispatched on a certain date and that an early decision would be appreciated. Usually, of course, a MS. will be accepted or returned in a far shorter time than this. In the event of acceptance the editor will usually state the price he is prepared to pay, the rights he is purchasing and the probable date of publication. A few firms pay on acceptance, but as a rule payment is made on publication.

Proof Correction.

Most weekly and monthly journals do their own proof correction within the office—and a good deal of "subbing" of the material to be used as well—but some, particularly the scientific and cultural journals, submit proofs of articles for correction to their con-

tributors. With books, it is always the custom to give authors an opportunity to go through the proofs before publication.

Proofs are corrected twice, first at the galley stage, when a "pull" is taken on long, narrow sheets about a yard in length with wide margins for corrections. After these corrections have been made, the type is broken up into pages and a set of page-proofs is prepared—a roughly bound volume with the pages set out as they will appear in the book when published. Corrections at this stage must be made with caution, since any considerable alteration may entail resetting one or more whole pages.

An author may be asked to correct proofs at either or both of these two stages. There are conventional signs for correcting proofs which the reader will find set out in the *Writers' and Artists' Year Book*, *Teach Yourself Typewriting* and elsewhere. It is wise to adopt the standard practice as it is then easier for the printer to understand the author's requirements.

Magazine Production.

All who wish to contribute to the magazine periodical Press would do well to learn something of the manner in which a weekly or monthly magazine is produced; it would help them to avoid many pitfalls and understand many otherwise inexplicable editorial requirements. For a full and most interesting description of the daily work in a periodical office the reader is referred to an excellent little manual for beginners *Journalism for Women* by Miss Molly Graham. (See Book List, p. 197.) A few points of direct concern to the outside contributor may be mentioned here.

- (a) Each issue of the magazine is planned as a whole, so that any contribution used is accepted not only on its merits but because it fits into the editorial plan. Hence the frequent rejection of apparently suitable material and the preference many editors have for commissioning work rather than relying on the chance of a suitable contribution coming uninvited.
- (b) This planning must be done well in advance so that the many successive processes may be completed before press date. For monthly magazines, therefore, contributions should be in about three months in advance; for weeklies anything from three to six weeks.
- (c) As the plan for an issue takes shape, the items are marked on a dummy copy consisting of blank sheets of paper. The space on each page is allocated with almost mathematical precision to letterpress, illustrations, advertisements, etc. Contributions must fit exactly into the space allotted. Hence the need for contributors to study the usual length of articles and stories being published in any journal, although minor adjustments will, of course, be made in the office.
- (d) Letterpress and illustrations are dealt with in different departments, so that drawings, diagrams or sketches should always be made on separate sheets and not on the same pages as the typescript.

One last word. The freelance should always keep a copy of all published contributions. The best method is to cut these out from the periodicals in

which they appeared and paste them into a book with a note giving the name of the periodical and the date of publication. Such a record is not only interesting to have for one's own personal files, but may also prove valuable if a staff post is ever sought on a newspaper or magazine.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE LAW OF COPYRIGHT AND LIBEL

ALTHOUGH we enjoy a wide freedom of the Press in this country, the journalist or author will soon find that he cannot write and publish just what he pleases. Certain limitations are placed upon him, principally by the laws of copyright and libel.

The Nature of Copyright.

Copyright is the sole right to reproduce in any material form the whole or any part of some literary, dramatic, musical or artistic work which is the fruit of someone's skill or endeavour. There is no copyright in news, in facts or in ideas which have not yet been worked out, but any particular arrangement or presentation of such news, facts or ideas might be protected by copyright.

No formalities are required to secure copyright protection. Every literary or other work which comes within the Act is automatically protected in this country as soon as created, whether a notice stating that copyright is reserved is added or not.

The Ownership of Copyright.

Copyright belongs in the first instance to the author of the literary or other work concerned (except in the case of a work produced by a salaried employee in the course of his employment, when the copyright belongs, in the absence of any agreement to the contrary, to the employer). Copyright can be

assigned, sold, or otherwise disposed of as with any other personal property, and the owner of copyright may grant a licence to another (e.g. an editor or publisher) to make some use or uses of his work while still retaining the copyright (see Serial Rights below). Copyright in literary works subsists during the lifetime of the original owner and for fifty years after his death.

Copyright in photographs of portraits which have been paid for belongs to the client; where no charge is made, however, copyright belongs to the photographer or other person carrying out the work.

Infringement of Copyright.

The essence of breach of copyright (we are concerned here with literary work), consists in the act of *copying*, reproducing the arrangement and form of words in which some material has been expressed. To make use in an article of facts which another writer has gathered is no infringement of copyright, but to arrange these facts in the same way, or to use them to illustrate the same points or ideas would be. Parts of a copyright work (i.e. quotations from it) may be reproduced by way of criticism or review without any breach of copyright, but such reproduction must be fair and reasonable. In this matter of quotation it should be remembered that most authors, if asked, are usually more than ready to permit quotations from their works provided these are acknowledged, since their own prestige is thereby enhanced. The test is whether any "lifting" is likely to compete with or in any way damage the sales of the original work. An author who considers his copyright has been infringed can seek an injunction to prevent a repetition

of the infringement and/or damages to compensate him for the loss sustained thereby.

Serial and Other Rights.

Any freelance writer who wishes to make a serious business of his writing must understand something of the various rights of which he can dispose and see that he does not part with more in any one transaction than he intended. His task is not made easier by the habit of some editors of obtaining more rights than they need or intend to use—stipulating, for example, that payment made should be for “all rights” or for “copyright”, when they only intend to make one use of the material.

The term “serial rights” covers the right to publish or republish an article, story or other contribution in any newspaper, periodical or annual. It includes “first serial rights” (the original publication), “second serial rights” (the second publication, e.g. by a syndicate supplying material to provincial or overseas periodicals) and any further right to publish the material. Since all such publications must be paid for to someone, it is clearly in the interest of the author to reserve as many of these rights to himself as he can, always supposing he can exploit them, or to see that, if such further publication does take place, he receives his fair share of reward.

It is a good plan to state in a covering letter when submitting MSS. what rights are offered. The editor can then negotiate on the matter if he wishes. Some otherwise reputable firms have a bad habit of accepting MSS. without stating the rights they are acquiring, publishing the material and then forwarding a cheque

with an endorsement inviting the author to sign away the copyright. The present writer had this experience on one occasion with an article submitted to a journal of the highest standing, only to find the article reprinted later in full by two other leading journals, for which reprinting he received no payment whatever.

An author who has secured the publication of a story or article and has parted with first serial rights only can then think about selling the second serial rights elsewhere. The syndicates (which will be found listed in the reference books) are his most likely market here.

Many writers have found this negotiating of successive rights, though too profitable to ignore, so irksome and distasteful that they prefer to place the disposal of their literary output in the hands of a reliable agent. They consider the ten per cent or so commission charged amply offset by the saving in time, trouble and postage in attempts to discover and exploit markets for themselves.

Space will not permit here any discussion of the difficult problems of Foreign and particularly United States Copyright. For a full treatment of this and allied topics the reader is referred to the current issue of the *Writers' and Artists' Year Book* published by A. & C. Black—a most valuable work of reference which no freelance writer can afford to be without.

Publishers' Agreements.

The two principal types of publishers' agreement are (a) those in which the author disposes of his copyright outright for a lump sum, and (b) those in which the author is to be paid a royalty on copies of the book sold.

Where the author disposes of his copyright he has no further financial interest in the book, no matter how successful it may be. This is seldom a satisfactory arrangement from the author's standpoint unless, as with a learned or educational treatise, he may consider the prestige value of the publication is in itself of considerable value or unless the sum offered is sufficient to give a fair percentage return on the number of copies which the publisher may reasonably be expected to sell. This type of agreement is rare today, except with children's books where it persists almost to the point of exploitation.

In the second and more usual type of agreement the publisher undertakes the whole cost and labour of publication, advertisement and sale, the author being paid a royalty (usually about ten per cent of the selling price) on each copy sold. A higher rate (e.g. 12½ per cent) is paid after a stipulated number of copies have been sold. Although most publishing houses in this country have a high reputation for fair and honest dealing, an author should always study his agreement carefully, noting the rights and obligations of both himself and the publisher. If in doubt he should take further advice before signing. It should be noted that membership of the Society of Authors (subscription 30s. p.a.) entitles members, among other privileges, to free advice on all legal matters affecting their literary work.

• The Law of Libel.

The law of libel is full of pitfalls for the unwary author, principally because the essence of the matter lies not in the intention of the writer but in the effect what is written is likely to have on the person libelled.

Thus it is possible to libel someone of whose very existence you are unaware.

A libel, or more correctly a defamatory libel, is a published statement about a person, or which may be taken to refer to a particular person, which exposes that person to hatred, ridicule or contempt, or is likely to injure him in his trade or profession.

To the writer of fiction the danger lies in real people identifying themselves with his fictitious characters. Clearly, the author must see to it that there are no *genuine* grounds for this. But even then there is no guarantee that someone will not come forward and say that an unpleasant character bearing his name, or said to live in the same district, or having a certain combination of characteristics, or whose life history as depicted in the book corresponds to his own, has been taken by his friends and acquaintances to represent him and his reputation has been injured thereby. He may be aided and abetted in his claim by a certain type of solicitor specialising in this often shabby business, and the author, unless he settles the case out of court, may find himself with considerable damages and costs to pay. The greatest care must be exercised, therefore, in minimising this risk of identification.

The classic example of such identification is the case of a newspaper publishing a humorous sketch in which a fictitious character, one Artemus Jones, churchwarden of Peckham, was depicted as disporting himself somewhat questionably at a Continental resort. A barrister of the same name (who was neither a churchwarden nor a resident of Peckham), brought an action in which he declared, with the support of a number of witnesses, that the article

might be taken to refer to him to his discredit. He won his case and was awarded £1,750 damages. The judge's ruling is worth quoting :

The point upon which your verdict must turn is, ought or ought not sensible and reasonable people reading this article to think that it was a mere imaginary person—Tom Jones, Mr. Pecksniff as a humbug, Mr. Stiggins, or any of that sort of names that one reads of in literature used as types ? If you think any reasonable person would think that, it is not actionable at all. If, on the other hand, you think that people would suppose it to mean some real person—those who did not know the plaintiff of course would not know who the real person was, but those who did know of the existence of the plaintiff would think that it was the plaintiff—then the action is maintainable, subject to such damages as you think under all the circumstances are fair and right to give the plaintiff.

Although the laws of libel seem heavily weighted against the writer he does enjoy some protection. This is known as " privilege ". It is almost impossible to comment upon public affairs or matters of general interest without including statements which may be taken as reflecting adversely on some of those concerned. But the law provides that in a wide variety of instances such adverse statements are privileged. All reports of Parliamentary proceedings, meetings of Councils, Committees and other public bodies, proceedings in the Courts (provided they are reported contemporaneously and fairly) may be published without fear of being actionable.

Privilege also extends to reports of public meetings, so long as the subject-matter of the report is published in the public interest. In the same way, it is permissible to comment adversely on the conduct of

public men in so far as the performance of their public duties is concerned. The guiding principle here is that if a statement is published without malice and in the public interest it will not as a rule be held to be libellous.

The writer is also allowed a considerable latitude in what is known as "fair comment". This is a valuable protection for those whose duty it is, as critics or reviewers, to discuss the work or performance of others. In commenting adversely on a book, play, dramatic performance or work of art, or on a player's or team's performance in some form of sport, the writer is fairly safe in expressing his honest opinion, so long as:—

- (a) he is not actuated by malice,
- (b) he confines himself strictly to the matter under consideration,
- (c) he does not misrepresent facts, and
- (d) the facts on which his adverse comments are based are stated, or referred to.

Thus a writer must not persecute one person with adverse criticism, particularly if he has a grudge against that person; he must not make slashing general attacks on a person's motives or general competence at his work, quite apart from and beyond the particular instance he is examining at the moment; he must make it clear to his reader on what exactly he is basing his adverse criticism and he must not impute faults or shortcomings which the facts do not warrant.

As an example of the last we may quote the case of *Merrivale v. Carson* in which a critic was successfully sued for his statement that a play was "a hash-up of ingredients which have been used *ad*

nauseam, until one rises up in protest against the loving, confiding, fatuous husband with the naughty wife and her double existence . . .," the grounds of the action being that the text of the play did not justify the immoral implication contained in the words "naughty wife with her double existence".

In this chapter some of the legal aspects of the writer's craft have been touched upon, but in outline only: it cannot be too strongly emphasised, however, that any writer who finds himself or herself in any legal difficulty should at once seek competent professional advice. The intricacies of the law of libel, in particular, are too complicated for the layman to handle.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FREELANCE MARKETS

IN Chapter I we spoke in general of the opportunities open to the freelance who wishes to take up writing as a part-time or full-time occupation. Some more details may now be given about the markets where he may dispose of his literary output after he has progressed beyond the apprenticeship stage.

The number of newspapers and magazines issued in this country alone, apart from those in the Dominions and the United States, is very great indeed. There are, too, a large number of publishing houses, each producing a list of new books several times a year. It would be impossible, therefore, in the space available here to attempt anything like a comprehensive market guide. All that can be done is to supplement with some examples what has been said about marketing earlier in the book. For complete lists of periodicals and publishers, with their requirements, the reader is referred to such works of reference as *Willing's Press Guide* and *The Writers' and Artists' Year Book*—both of which (in an up-to-date edition) should be on every freelance writer's desk.

It may be well to begin by repeating a few points of general advice on marketing:—

- (a) Begin modestly. Do not send your first feature article to the *Daily Mail* or your first short story to *Argosy* or *Britannia and Eve*. Choose a market where the competition is less keen.
- (b) Survey as wide a field of periodicals as you can

which publish the kind of work you have in mind to write so that you gain a grasp of the market as a whole.

- (c) Study a particular market scientifically before you attempt to break into it. Estimate and note its reader-interest and policy, the style and length of contributions published and whether these are illustrated.
- (d) When one contribution has been accepted, send others after it (not a mass of rejected "stock", but fresh material as good as that already accepted). Do not be discouraged by the rejection of what you are convinced is a saleable and suitably marketed MS. ; it may have been rejected for editorial reasons which have nothing to do with the quality of your work. Re-write it if necessary, and send it elsewhere.

1. Newspapers.

There is much more scope for the freelance in newspaper journalism than many beginners realise—not so much in the collection of news as in the writing of special articles and in feature work. There are 1,300 weekly, 35 provincial daily, 81 provincial evening, 9 London daily, 3 London evening and 16 Sunday papers published in Great Britain, all of them crying out for brightly written, informative, meaty articles, paragraphs and features. Editors have no prejudice against beginners, against women writers, or against contributors who live far from the big cities. If the stuff is good and reliable, they will buy it, wherever it comes from. Naturally, provincial papers prefer material with a local tie-up ; but their readers' interests are not entirely limited to the parish pump.

Every freelance should regard his local paper as a natural jumping-off point. He knows the ground; competition for space is far less keen than in Fleet Street; the editor is always glad to encourage local talent if the material submitted merits encouragement; and many provincial papers are so desperately short of good feature copy written locally that they fill up with far more syndicated matter than they would wish. If you have an article suitable for a local paper, either in your own or another district, send it in. If you have a bright idea for a series or a regular feature, make an appointment and see the editor. One freelance student of mine, who had never written a line for publication before, sold more than a score of articles within two months to four local papers (and then nearly spoiled it all by sending the same "special" to two papers whose circulation areas overlapped!) Freelance journalism, like charity, often begins at home.

Only when he has gained some experience should the freelance attack the national daily and Sunday papers. Topicality is the secret here, and this usually means working at high speed to supply for tomorrow's paper background articles on today's news. There is always a market for centenary, anniversary and seasonal articles of first-rate quality, but these are usually either commissioned or bought long in advance. So if you have something really new to say about Guy Fawkes, let the editor have it early in October.

Full alphabetical lists of British newspapers will be found in *Willing's Press Guide*, including a list classified under counties, and another under towns, which can be useful when there is an article of local interest to be sold.

2. Trade and Technical Press,

Most of these papers produced for groups of readers following the same trade or profession are something between newspapers and magazines, and perform the functions of both. Lacking the elaborate nationwide network of news-gatherers possessed by the newspapers and agencies, they are only too glad to receive items of news and "personality" paragraphs from freelance journalists in the provinces, and are usually very ready to accept offers to act as their representative in areas not already being covered. The specialist will, of course, submit longer contributions to the appropriate technical and trade papers, but even the non-specialist will often find, by studying specimen copies, that many of these periodicals publish background articles of a general nature with only a slight tie-up with their specialised interest.

Many of these class publications are taken by the Public Libraries, others can be seen on the bookstalls. One or two back numbers will often be sent free of charge in response to a courteously worded application to the publishers (whose addresses can be found in the reference books already mentioned). A journal on a most abstruse or unpromising subject may often on inspection be found to publish some matter well within the scope of the non-specialist—and many editors of trade papers would publish more good background material if they could get it.

As an indication of the wide range of trade and technical journals catering for particular interests, we give below two groups taken from Willing's list of Class Publications.

Radio

Amateur Radio Hand-
book.

Arabic Listener.

B.B.C. Quarterly.

B.B.C. Year Book.

British Radio and Tele-
vision.

British Television Year
Book.

Broadcasting Bulletin
Electrical and Radio
Trading.

Electronic Engineering

Irish Radio and Elec-
trical Journal.

Journal of British Insti-
tution of Radio En-
gineers.

Journal of Television
Society.

Kelly's Directory of
Wireless and Allied
Trades.

Listener.

London Calling.

Pianomaker, Music Sel-
ler and Radio Retailer.

Practical Wireless.

Radio Constructor.

Radio Digest.

Radio Entertainment
World.

Radio Handbook Sup-
plement.

Radio.—Perception.

Radio Receiver Specifi-
cations.

Radio Register.

Radio Review.

Radio Times.

Relay Association Jour-
nal.

R.S.G.B. Bulletin.

R.T.R.A. Magazine.

Scan.

Scottish Radio Digest.

Short Wave Listener.

Signal.

Television.

Voice of the World.

Wireless and Electrical
Trader.

Wireless Engineer.

Wireless World.

Wireless World Diary

Zodiac.

Journalism

Amateur Press World.

British Amateur Jour-
nalist.

British Annual of Litera-
ture.

Cable and Wireless Com-
mercial Handbook.

Erdington Amateur.

Fleet Street Annual.

Free Lance Weekly.

London Amateur Re-
corder.

Midnight Oil.

Monthly Press Informa-
tion.

Newspaper Press Direc-
tory.

Newspaper World.

Reporters' Magazine

Reuter's Journal.

Free Lance Writer and Photographer.	Scribe.
House Organ Magazine.	Warner's Writer's World.
Inky Way Annual.	Willing's Press Guide.
Interesting Items.	Woman Journalist.
International Amateur Scrap-Book.	World's Press News. Writer.
International Amateur 'Who's Who.'	Writers' and Artists' Year Book
Ireland's Press and Printing	Writer's Gazette.
Journal of Institute of Journalists.	Writer's News.
Journalist.	Writer's News Letter.
	Writers of Midlands.

3. Syndicates and News Agencies.

The function of the syndicate or news agency is different from that of the literary agency, although there is inevitably some overlap. The syndicate is concerned with supplying news items and topical special articles or feature material principally to newspapers, either in this country or abroad. The usual custom is to charge a commission on all work actually placed. It is always as well before submitting material to find out what this commission will be and the terms on which work is accepted. The advantage of allowing an agency to handle contributions is that their knowledge of possible markets will be much wider than that of the average freelance—particularly overseas markets. A list of syndicates and news agencies is given in the *Writers' and Artists' Year Book*.

4. Magazines.

The distinguishing feature of magazine journalism is that its function is principally to provide entertainment. It is in their moments of leisure that readers

turn to the pages of a magazine, and although they are often glad enough to pick up useful information by the way on topics that interest them, their main aim is to be amused. Hence the popularity among magazine editors of the short story, the light, brightly written article and the entertaining feature.

The most convenient method of classifying magazines is by reader-interest, e.g. those intended principally for men, for women or for children; those specialising in the home, fashion and beauty, travel, hobbies, sport, theatre and cinema, humour, and so on. Within these larger groups it is often possible to sub-divide according to the class or general intelligence of the readers at whom a magazine is aimed. Thus not all women's magazines would be taken or enjoyed by the same type of woman reader. This matter of reader-interest must be taken carefully into consideration when studying any magazine market.

Those whose chief interest lies in short-story writing will find that magazines vary greatly in the type of stories they buy. While *Adventure*, for example, requires "lively, healthy and up-to-date stories that fit the title of the paper", *Red Letter* looks for stories of "love, mystery, pathos and stirring incidents"; *Blackwood's* with its very different reading public, requires stories "strong in plot and characterisation", dealing with adventure, travel, history; while *Argosy* accepts only fiction of the highest literary standard. It is useless to hawk a story vaguely round the magazine offices without regard to the type of story each is using. Nor are preliminary letters to the editor asking him if he will consider a story on this or that topic of much value. There is no substitute for intelligent study of back

issues of magazines, selected with the aid of a good Market Guide.

As with stories, so with articles. Magazines vary in their demands both with regard to the subject-matter of the articles they require and the treatment. Periodicals intended for the general reader are naturally less limited than those designed for readers with a special interest, but even the "general" magazines will usually be found to show a preference for a particular type of article. Thus *Chambers's Journal* has a preference for articles on literary, scientific and travel topics treated in a popular way, the *Queen*, *Tatler* and *Sphere* publish articles on sport, country life, motoring and other topics likely to interest well-to-do and leisured readers. *Illustrated London News* often carries articles on matters of current interest in art, archaeology and exploration, while *Blackwood's* has a marked preference for history and travel.

When preparing articles for a periodical with a specialised interest such as motoring, aviation, engineering, science, health, etc., the freelance should note the distinction between magazines intended for the man in the street interested in a particular topic and the trade and technical journals produced for those to whom this is a means of livelihood. Thus, while *The Aeroplane* and *Flight* are taken by a wide circle of readers interested in aviation, *Aircraft Engineering* and *Aircraft Production* are highly technical journals with a limited appeal. Naturally the subject-matter of articles and the treatment accorded will differ widely in the two groups. Again, *Light Car* and *Motor* are popular periodicals intended for the general reader interested in motoring, *Auto-*

mobile Engineer and *Transport Management* are technical journals and *Motor Trader* is a trade paper.

The following publishing houses will submit MSS. in turn to the editors of the various magazines, each publishes, if a request is made at the time of submission :—

Amalgamated Press (Central Editorial Service).

William Macdellan (short stories and poems only).

George Newnes (Central Editorial Department).

C. Arthur Pearson (Central Editorial Department).

W. Stevens, Ltd.

Temple Press, Ltd.

Thomson-Leng Publications (D.C. Thomson and John Leng & Co., Ltd., of Dundee).

The so-called "house magazines" issued to their staffs and/or customers by many large industrial firms and other undertakings offer a field which is quite uncultivated by most freelance writers, largely because the existence of many of these journals is not recorded in the reference books. And yet there is a constant demand for material for these periodicals and exceptionally high rates are often paid. The freelance engaged in building up a connection who can add a number of house magazines produced by prosperous firms to his list will be well repaid for the trouble of seeking them out. Specimen copies are usually sent very readily on request.

Book Publishing.

Although our main concern has been with the work of the freelance contributing to the periodical Press, a word may perhaps be added here on the marketing of MSS. of book length.

The MSS. which reach a publisher's office fall into

three groups (a) those that have been commissioned, (b) those in which the publisher has already shown interest and which he has agreed to consider on completion, and (c) those that arrive unheralded and unsolicited. The third group is by far the most numerous, although the great majority of those actually published, come from groups (a) and (b).

It is clearly to a writer's advantage to be sure that his book is likely to find a publisher, before he goes to the labour of writing it. On the other hand, few publishers will buy a pig's poke from an author of whose capabilities they know nothing. For a first book, therefore, it is perhaps best to complete the MS. and then seek a publisher afterwards.

Market study is as important in submitting book MSS. to publishers as it is in contributing articles and stories to magazines. All publishers' lists are not alike. Some make novels their main business while others are interested more in non-fiction—history, biography, economics, politics, etc. Some firms specialise in a comparatively restricted field such as law, general science, medicine. Nor do all publishing houses handling fiction issue novels of the same type: one firm will build up a reputation for the highest standards in writing so that a book bearing their imprint carries a guarantee of quality, while other firms are content to regard publishing as a mere money-making business and will issue anything they think will sell.

In selecting a publisher for his or her first book the beginner to authorship must be prepared to study lists of past publications with much care. A mere glance through the names of publishers in a Market Guide may be helpful as a starting-point but it will

not carry the seeker very far ; few publishers either claim to set for themselves standards above their fellows, or admit to being moved by mere mercenary motives. It is only by their past fruits that their particular specialities and preferences can be gauged. It is a waste of everyone's time to send a MS. to a publisher who has never yet published a book of that type—most beginners find it difficult enough to persuade even an appropriate publisher to handle their work. For information on publishers' agreements the reader is referred to page 175.

TEST EXERCISES.

Readers may care to attempt the following Exercises.

CHAPTER 1

1. Distinguish between journalism and authorship.
2. Mention some of the opportunities open to the freelance in journalism.
3. Name the principal fields of authorship at the present day.
4. Write a note on "Women in Journalism".

CHAPTER 2

(See p. 24.)

CHAPTER 3

1. What advice would you give to a beginner in freelance writing?
2. Mention some of the ways in which the freelance should work systematically.
3. What is "market study"? Why is this so important to the freelance?
4. Make a summary of the contents of a current magazine issue on the lines of that given in the chapter.

CHAPTER 4

1. Outline the steps the freelance should take in building up a connection.

2. Discuss the relations which should exist between writers and editors.
3. By what methods can a successful freelance place his work on a businesslike footing?

CHAPTER 5

1. In what ways can the Public Library be of service to the freelance writer?
2. Write a note on "The Art of Interviewing".
3. Describe one method of building up a cuttings file. How can such a collection be of value to the freelance?
4. Why is it advisable for the freelance writer to specialise? Mention some of the directions in which specialisation might prove profitable.

CHAPTER 6

1. Why is careful planning an essential preliminary to the writing of an article?
2. Explain the importance of accuracy in freelance writing. What books of reference should the writer have constantly at hand?
3. What is style? Name the most important elements in style from the point of view of the magazine journalist.
4. Collect and arrange material for an article on a topic in which you are particularly interested.

CHAPTER 7

1. Explain the importance of the introduction. Mention some effective methods of beginning an article.
2. Write a note on choosing titles.
3. Show how both meanings of the word "conclusion" are important in ending an article.

194 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

4. What is meant by unity in a written composition such as a magazine article?
5. Make an analysis of an article from a current magazine issue on the lines of that given in the text.

CHAPTER 8

1. What is "news"?
2. From what sources does a daily newspaper gather its news?
3. What are the opportunities open to the freelance in news gathering?
4. What general principles should the freelance journalist keep in mind in supplying news items to the Press?

CHAPTER 9

1. Define with examples the term "feature" as used in newspaper journalism.
2. What openings are there for the outside contributor in newspaper feature-work?
3. Describe the work of a freelance writer conducting a feature such as a letter-bag for a magazine.
4. Sketch out an idea for an attractive new feature suited to *either* a provincial evening paper *or* a woman's magazine.

CHAPTER 10

1. Discuss the statement that the most important element in the magazine short story is plot.
2. Make a synopsis of a short story in which you consider the plot is particularly well constructed.
3. What methods can the short story writer adopt to delineate character?

4. On what factors does the degree of prominence to be given to the setting of a story depend?
5. Discuss the relative importance of (a) narrative, (b) description, and (c) dialogue to the short-story writer in securing his effects.
6. What are the qualities which distinguish good dialogue?

CHAPTER 11

1. What tasks must the short-story writer accomplish in his opening paragraphs?
2. Describe some of the devices by which the reader's attention is held throughout the story.
3. Explain the part played by minor crises in the development of the story.
4. What is meant by the "climax" to a story? What qualities should this climax possess?
5. Write a critique of a story of your own choice on the lines of that given in this chapter.

CHAPTER 12

1. In what ways does writing for radio differ from other forms of writing?
2. What qualities go to the making of a successful feature-programme?
3. Choose a radio play you have listened to recently and analyse its success or failure as "good radio".
4. What is the policy of the B.B.C. towards its programmes for children? How far do you consider the average Children's Hour fare achieve these aims?

CHAPTER 13

1. In what ways is the technique of writing for children distinctive?

196 TEACH YOURSELF FREELANCE WRITING

2. Write notes on the tastes and requirements in reading matter of the different age-groups among children
3. What markets are there for children's writers at the present day?
4. Do you consider that the writer for children has any special responsibilities, and if so, what are they?

CHAPTER 14

1. What advantages has the illustrated over the un-illustrated article?
2. What factors go to the making of a good picture?
3. From what sources are pictures available to the writer who does not wish to take his own?
4. What points should the freelance bear in mind when submitting pictures to agencies and periodicals?
5. What opportunities are there in freelance photography as a career?

CHAPTER 15

1. In checking MSS. before typing, what are the faults for which the writer should be on the look-out?
2. Write down a list of instructions on preparing a MS. for submission to an editor.
3. What details should a title page contain?
4. Describe the successive stages in the production of one issue of a monthly magazine.

CHAPTER 16

1. What is copyright? To whom does it belong?
2. To what extent may one writer make use of the work of another?
3. Name and describe the various rights in his work of which an author can dispose.
4. What dangers does the law of libel present to the writer of fiction? How can these be best avoided?
5. What is (a) privilege and (b) "fair comment"?

SOME BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING

The Writers' and Artists' Year Book (published annually by A. & C. Black).

Willing's Press Guide.

Author's and Writer's Who's Who and Reference Guide (Shaw).

Complete Writing for Profit, Michael Joseph (Hutchinson).

Writing for the Press, Leonard Russell (A. & C. Black).

A Guide to Article-Writing, G. J. Matson (Blackie).

A B C of Authorship, Ursula Bloom (Blackie).

Journalism for Women, Molly Graham (Werner Laurie).

The Truth About Publishing, Sir Stanley Unwin (Allen & Unwin).

Illustrated Journalism, Wm. A. Bagley (Hutchinson).

Entry into Journalism, edited by A. Kenyon (Medallion Press).

The Children's Author, Christine Chaundler (Pitman).

How to Write a Play, St. John Ervine (Allen & Unwin).

How to Write Broadcast Plays, Val Gielgud (Hurst & Blackett).

Law for Journalists, Charles Pilley (Pitman).

Teach Yourself Journalism, E. Frank Candlin (English Universities Press).

Notes on Radio Drama (obtainable on application from the B.B.C.).

Inky Way Annual (published annually by *World's Press News*).

INDEX

- Accuracy**
 importance of, 23, 59
 in news-gathering, 81
 in radio scripts, 131
 in children's stories, 145
 in revising, 164
- Annals, children's**, 139, 147
- Article-writing**
 analysis of articles, 35, 71-7
 planning the article, 57 ff.
 methods of treatment, 57
 arranging material, 58
 gathering material, 58
 introductions, 65
 titles, 67
 conclusions, 69
 unity, 71
 example of, 72-5
 for magazines, 188
- Authorship**
 definition of, 10
 opportunities in, 11-12
 finding a publisher, 189
- Book list**, 97
- Book reviewing**, 92-3
- Business side of freelancing**,
 44 ff.
- Career, writing as a**
 motives for entering, 9
 full-time or part-time, 13
 photography as a career,
 160
- Characterisation**
 in short stories, 100-2
 methods of, 101
 sources of, 102
 in radio drama, 134
- Children, writing for**
 opportunities for the free-
 lance, 12, 139
- Children, writing for**
 magazine features, 88
 in radio, 136
 markets, 139, 147
 technique of, 141 ff.
 understanding the child
 mind, 142
 nursery stage, 143
 junior stage, 144
 schoolboy stage, 144
 schoolgirl stage, 146
- Commissioned work**, 43
- Conclusions**, 69-71
- Copyright**
 matter subject to, 47
 radio, 130
 sale of, 140
 nature of, 172
 ownership of, 172
 infringement of, 173
- Cuttings file**
 compiling a, 52
 use of, 53
- Description in short stories**,
 104
- Dialogue**
 in short stories, 105
 in radio drama, 133
- Drama for radio**, 132
- Dramatic criticism**, 92
- Editors**
 function of, 16, 33, 38
 61
 making contact with, 41
 interviews with, 41
 submitting MSS. to, 166
- Educational background**
 mastery of correct English,
 17-18
 importance of, 19

- Education, background
 becoming well informed, 20-1
 keeping up to date, 21
 English, correct
 importance of, 17
 acquiring a mastery of, 18
 revising MSS., 163
 Exercises, 24-7, 192-6
- Features
 opportunities for the free-
 lance, 11, 44, 86
 definition of, 86
 post-bag, 87
 woman's page, 88
 conducting, 89-91
 film and dramatic criticism, 92
 book reviewing, 92
 miscellaneous, 93
 radio, 131
- Film criticism, 92
- Freelance writer, the
 motives for becoming, 9
 need for training, 28
 qualities required by, 28, 43, 49
 making a start, 29
 working systematically, 30
 first steps, 38
 building up a connection, 38-9, 41 ff.
 following up a success, 40
 finding markets, 181
- Gossip column, 88
- Historical novels, 140
- House magazines
 news gathering for, 84
 as freelance markets, 180
- Humour, 94
- Ideas
 from books and periodicals, 47
 sources of, 47 ff., 58
- Ideas
 from people, 49
 from experience, 51
 storing, 52
 from the cuttings file, 63
- Income tax
 payable on freelance earnings, 46
 reliefs claimable, 46
- Influence as aid to success, 15, 38
- Interviewing, 49-50
- Introductions, 65-7
- Journalism
 definition of, 10
 opportunities for the free-lance in, 10-11
 technical and trade journals, 185
- Law for freelance writers, 172 ff.
- Length
 importance of right, 34, 62
 of paragraphs, 62
 of radio scripts, 132
 of children's stories, 143, 144
- Libel, Law of, 90, 176-80
- Libraries
 use of, 48, 184
 as measure of author's reputation, 140
- Literary Agents, 44
- Magazines
 production of, 22, 169-71
 policy of, 32, 33, 39, 147
 reader interest of, 32-4, 61, 187
 feature work for, 86 ff.
 children's, 147
 as freelance markets, 186
 function of, 186
- Market study, 31 ff., 39 ff.
 need for, 31
 methods of, 33

- Market study
 "markets" note-book, 34
 example of, 35
 finding a market, 57, 181, 190
 freelance markets, 181 ff.
 placing pictures, 158
- Narrative in short stories, 103
- News, definition of, 78
- News Agencies, 79, 186
- News correspondent, the free-lance as, 83, 84
- News gathering
 opportunities for the free-lance, 11, 80, 81
 qualities required for, 78, 81-2
 system of, 79
- Newspapers
 production of, 22
 ideas from, 47
 paragraphing in, 62
 news-gathering for, 79
 feature work for, 86 ff.
 as freelance markets, 182
- Note-books
 for market study, 33
 for records, 44
 for ideas, 54
 for suggestions, 54, 57
- Novel-writing, 12
- Pictures, 151 ff.
 value of, 151-2
 selection of, 152
 quality of, 154
 obtaining, 155
 agencies, 157, 161
 submitting, 158
 captions for, 159
 packing, 159
 photography as a career, 160
 filing, 161
- Plots, 97 ff.
 in short stories, 97
 how to find, 99
- Plots
 analysis of, 108-23
 elements in plot-construction, 123-5
 in radio drama, 134
 for children, 143-6
- Post-bag features, 87, 91-2
- Production, methods of, 22, 169
- Proof-correction, 168
- Publishers, 149, 168, 189
 of children's books, 139, 149
 agreements, 173
 with central editorial service, 189
- Radio, writing for, 127 ff.
 opportunities in, 127, 130
 technique of, 128
 Talks, 129
 features, 131
 short stories, 132
 drama, 133
 variety, 135
 children's hour, 136, 148
 in the regions, 137
 Third Programme, 138
 submitting scripts, 138
 radio journals, 185
- Rates of payment, 39, 87
 for children's stories, 140, 149
- Records
 of contributions placed, 45
 of income and expenditure, 45
- Reference books
 importance to the free-lance, 59
 list of, 59-61
- Responsibility, the writer's, 23, 81-2, 149
- Royal Commission on the Press, 20
- Scripts, submitting radio, 138
- Serial rights, 141, 168, 174

Setting in short stories, 102
 Short story writing, 95 ff.
 opportunities for the free-lance, 11
 for magazines, 95 ff., 187
 economy of expression in, 95
 unity in, 96
 appearance of reality in, 96
 elements in, 96
 plot, 97-107, 120-5
 characterisation, 100-2
 setting, 102
 narrative, 103
 description, 104
 dialogue, 105
 analysis of, 108-123
 example of, 109-120
 do's and don't's, 126
 for radio, 132
 Special articles
 opportunities for the free-lance, 11
 for magazines, 188
 Specialisation, 54, 84
 Style
 adapting to occasion, 18
 learning by imitation, 19, 29
 in article writing, 61
 length, 62
 paragraphs, 62
 sentence construction, 62
 word order, 63
 diction, 63
 attitude to reader, 64
 in introductions, 67
 in writing for children, 143
 Submitting MSS., 162 ff.
 dispatching pictures, 158-9

Submitting MSS.
 revising, 162-4
 preparing typescript, 164
 dispatching MSS., 166
 proof correction, 168
 Syndicates, 186
 Talks, radio, 129
 Technical and Trade Press
 news gathering for, 83
 as freelance markets, 184
 lists of periodicals, 185
 Third Programme, 138
 Title pages, 165-6
 Titles, 67-9
 Topicality, 23, 58, 183
 Variety, Radio, 135
 Vocabulary
 acquiring a wide, 19
 choices of words, 63
 in children's stories, 143-4
 Willing's *Press Guide*, 61, 139, 181, 183, 184, 197
 Woman's Page, 88
 Women writers
 opportunities for, 14
 status of, 15
 Write, learning to
 essential for success, 13, 17
 mastering various styles, 18, 19
 diction, 19
 analysing successes and failures, 40
 Writers' and Artists' Year Book, 34, 45, 60, 175, 181, 197